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LIFE OF GOETHE



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*Goethe.*

# LIFE OF GOETHE

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. NEW TRAVELS AND INTERESTS, 1791-1792 . . .	401
XXIV. GOETHE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION . . .	415
XXV. GOETHE AND SCHILLER . . . . .	438
XXVI. GOETHE'S EXTERNAL LIFE DURING HIS ASSOCIATION WITH SCHILLER, 1794-1805 . . . . .	454
XXVII. POETICAL PRODUCTIONS DURING THE SCHILLER YEARS, 1794-1805 . . . . .	481
XXVIII. WRITINGS IN PROSE DURING THE SCHILLER YEARS	508
XXIX. LIFE FROM 1805-1809. THE BATTLE OF JENA— GOETHE AND NAPOLEON . . . . .	525
XXX. <i>PANDORA—DIE WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN</i> . . .	551
XXXI. GOETHE AND THE WAR OF LIBERATION— <i>DES</i> <i>EPIMENIDES ERWACHEN</i> . . . . .	570
XXXII. <i>WEST-ÖSTLICHER DIVAN</i> , 1814-1818 . . .	589
XXXIII. ECKERMANN—ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW—ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1819-1824 . . . . .	613
XXXIV. CLOSING YEARS OF WORK, 1825-1831 . . .	636
XXXV. <i>DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT—WILHELM MEISTER</i> .	660
XXXVI. <i>WILHELM MEISTERS WANDERJAHRE</i> . . .	695
XXXVII. <i>FAUST</i> —FIRST PART . . . . .	719
XXXVIII. <i>FAUST</i> —SECOND PART (BY LORD HALDANE) . .	748
XXXIX. LAST MONTHS—CONCLUSION, JULY, 1831—MARCH, 1832 . . . . .	779
INDEX . . . . .	801





# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	TO FACE	PAGE
GOETHE . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
<i>From a drawing by D. Maclise, R.A., in the Victoria and Albert Museum</i>		
GOETHE'S HOUSE IN WEIMAR . . . . .		414
GOETHE: OCTOBER, 1807 . . . . .		538
GOETHE IN OLD AGE . . . . .		782



# LIFE OF GOETHE

## CHAPTER XXIII

### NEW TRAVELS AND INTERESTS

1791—1792

THOUGH on his return to Weimar Goethe had been relieved of the burden of his official duties, his attachment to the Court still involved a sacrifice of time which he would have preferred to give to the special pursuits in which he was interested. During the years 1790–3 he spent more than a year away from Weimar and in conditions which were not always congenial, although they brought their own profit to himself and to the world.

As we have noted, he did not find himself happy in Weimar during the period immediately following his return. His breach with Frau von Stein and the general lack of sympathy from former friends had resulted in his complete isolation from Weimar society. "For Weimar," wrote Frau Herder to her husband, "Goethe is no longer of any use." It was doubtless out of a desire for temporary escape from a painful situation that in the autumn of 1789 he contemplated a second journey to Italy where he had found refuge from his previous unhappiness. The prospect of Christiane's confinement probably prevented his carrying out his intention, but in the spring of the following year an opportunity came and he decided to avail himself of it. The Duchess Amalia, who had been on a visit to Rome in company with Herder, was on

the point of returning, and she had expressed the wish that Goethe would meet them at Venice.

In the middle of March he set out on his journey, and it is a significant commentary on his situation in Weimar that it was the general impression there that he would never return. Yet it was in no such mood of jubilant expectation as on the occasion of his first journey that he again visited the country in which he had found his re-birth. Writing to Herder on his way to Venice, he says that it was from no "real inner impulse" that he was prosecuting his journey. As it happened, the conditions of his sojourn in Venice were not such as to rekindle his enthusiasm. The weather, always a primary factor in Goethe's enjoyment of his surroundings, was unpropitious; it snowed in the beginning of April, and during the remainder of his stay it was frequently cold and wet. To his annoyance, also, the arrival of the Duchess was delayed, and it was not till May 6 that she appeared, attended by Herder and two of his former associates in Rome, Meyer and Bury. In his letters to various friends and in a series of epigrams we have a record of how he spent his time both before and after their arrival, and this record presents him in a mood which contrasts strangely with that in which he had lived during his first Italian journey. As he depicts his feelings, they are those of one even abnormally dependent on external conditions for his personal happiness—a characteristic hardly compatible with self-sufficing egotism. It appears both from his letters and from his epigrams that Christiane and the home she had made for him lay most on his heart. He commends her to the good offices of the Duke, and expresses his gratitude to the Herders for their kind attention to her. His one passionate desire was to be beside her again in the privacy of his home and his garden, where domestic comfort and affection awaited him. And it is in his deprivation of these joys that we see the main cause of the

altered mood in which he regarded Italy and its people. His present journey, he told the Duke, had given "a deadly blow" to his love for Italy, and he compared himself to Smelfungus in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* who saw everything through his own distempered emotions.

Yet, in spite of his splenetic humour, he would not have been Goethe had he not utilized to the full the leisure at his disposal. During his stay in Venice, he told Frau Herder, he had "seen, read, thought, versified" more than he had ever done in a year in the circle of his friends. He visited pictures till he was sick of the sight of them, and he made a careful study of the Venetian constitution—a subject at that moment, he says, of special interest when everybody was talking of constitutions.<sup>1</sup> But now and for some years to come it was the study of nature, and not of literature and art, that had the first place in his mind.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing the opportunity which the neighbouring sea gave him, he made careful note of the structure of crabs and fishes, which resulted in "some beautiful observations." A lucky incident that befell him in the course of his scientific researches has its place in the history of comparative anatomy. One day in the course of a visit to the Jewish burying-ground in Venice, his servant Götz jestingly handed him a skull as that of a Jew. It proved to be the damaged skull of a sheep, and in his examination of it Goethe found conclusive proof of the conjecture that had long been in his mind, that the skull of animals is a modification of the vertebra.

After a few weeks spent in Venice with the Duchess in re-examining what he had already seen, he successively visited with her Padua, Vicenza,

<sup>1</sup> The French Revolution broke out while Goethe was in Venice.

<sup>2</sup> In one of the best known of his Venetian epigrams he says :

"Mit Botanik giebst du dich ab ? Mit Optik ? Was thust du ?

Ist es nicht schöner Gewinn, rühren ein zärtliches Herz ?

Ach, die zärtlichen Herzen ! Ein Pfuscher vermag sie zu rühren ;

Sei es mein einziges Glück, dich zu berühren, Natur !"



Verona, and Mantua, and was back in Weimar in the beginning of June.<sup>1</sup> His anatomical discovery was the most notable incident of his second Italian journey, and his *Venetian Epigrams* are its literary memorial. As their subjects indicate, a few of them were written either before or after his travels in Italy, but most of them were produced during his stay in Venice. In one of them he describes the heterogeneous nature of their contents.

Wie dem hohen Apostel ein Tuch voll Tiere gezeigt ward,  
Rein und unrein, zeigt, Lieber, das Büchlein sich dir.

Composed, as he himself says, after the manner rather of Martial than of the Greek epigrams, many of them unpleasantly suggest Smelfungus. He has biting words on the trade of priests and on fanatics in general, and on the Venetian ways of life. He disparages the German language as inadequate for the highest effects in poetry—a slight which was keenly resented by Klopstock,—and he tells his countrymen that they were born bunglers in the poetic art. Occasionally we have a sequence of epigrams on one and the same theme, such as those recalling *Christiane*, and those on the French Revolution,—the last of special interest as containing his first words on an event which was subsequently to occupy much of his time and thought. Two of them may be quoted, as they express his permanent attitude to the French revolutionary movement.

Alle Freiheits-Apostel, sie waren mir immer zuwider ;  
Willkür suchte doch nur Jeder am Ende für sich.  
Willst du Viele befreien, so wag' es Vielen zu dienen.  
Wie gefährlich das sei, willst du es wissen ? Versuch's !

Könige wollen das Gute, die Demagogen desgleichen,  
Sagt man ; doch irren sie sich ; Menschen, ach, sind sie,  
wie wir.

Nie gelingt es der Menge, für sich zu wollen ; wir wissen's ;  
Doch wer verstehet, für uns alle zu wollen ; Er zeig's.

<sup>1</sup> Herder had gone home, Meyer to Switzerland, and Bury had returned to Rome.

Most interesting of all the epigrams, however, is that in which he pays a tribute to Carl August's beneficent government of his dominion and to his own deep debt to him.

Klein ist unter den Fürsten Germaniens freilich der meine ;  
 Kurz und schmal ist sein Land, mässig nur, was Er vermag.  
 Aber so wende nach innen, so wende nach aussen die Kräfte  
 Jeder ; da wär's ein Fest, Deutscher mit Deutschen zu sein.  
 Doch was priesest du Ihn, den Thaten und Werke verkünden ?  
 Und bestochen erschien deine Verehrung vielleicht ;  
 Denn mir hat Er gegeben, was Grosse selten gewähren ;  
 Neigung, Musse, Vertraun, Felder und Garten und Haus.  
 Niemand braucht' ich zu danken als Ihm, und Manches bedurft'  
 ich,  
 Der ich mich auf den Erwerb schlecht, als ein Dichter,  
 verstand.  
 Hat mich Europa gelobt, was hat mir Europa gegeben ?  
 Nichts : ich habe, wie schwer ! meine Gedichte bezahlt.  
 Deutschland ahmte mich nach, und Frankreich mochte mich  
 lesen.  
 England ! freundlich empfindest du den zerrütteten Gast.<sup>1</sup>  
 Doch was fördert es mich, dass auch sogar der Chinese  
 Malet mit ängstlicher Hand Werthern und Lotten auf Glas<sup>2</sup> !  
 Niemals frug ein Kaiser nach mir, es hat sich kein König  
 Um mich bekümmert, und Er war mir August und Mäcen.

Goethe had scarcely settled down in the home for which he had so passionately longed before he was summoned or invited to a more extensive course of travel. During his absence political complications had arisen in which the future of the Duchy of Weimar might be involved. The King of Prussia, alarmed by intended operations of Austria against Turkey, had led an army into Silesia with the object of frustrating them, and Carl August, as Commander of the Magdeburg Cavalry, was now present in his camp. Carl August apparently deemed Goethe's presence indispensable, for he took him with him on two subsequent military expeditions ; and accordingly he expressed the wish or the command

<sup>1</sup> The English translation of *Werther*.

<sup>2</sup> Specimens of these had been brought to Germany.

that he should join him in the camp near Breslau. Goethe had refused similar orders or requests of the Duke on previous occasions, but, in spite of the attractions of Christiane and his garden, on this occasion he saw fit to comply, though, as he told von Knebel, he would find the fields sown with warriors instead of with plants and stones.

On July 26, only a few weeks after his return from Italy, he started on his journey and passing through Dresden, where he spent two pleasant days, he arrived at the Prussian camp near Breslau. He has told us how he was engaged in the midst of war's alarms; living apart like a hermit, he added to the number of his Venetian epigrams, studied comparative anatomy, and began a comic opera.<sup>1</sup> Negotiations between Prussia and Austria having resulted in a mutual understanding, the Prussian army withdrew, and during the remainder of the expedition Goethe spent most of his time in Breslau—"noisy, dirty, evil-smelling Breslau," as he calls it. Ever curious about lands and peoples, however, he travelled extensively in Silesia, and under the guidance of the director of mines in that country, received hints for the management of those at Ilmenau, then in a precarious financial condition. After journeying as far east as Cracow in company with the Duke, he returned by way of Dresden, where he spent over a week and renewed his acquaintance with Körner, the friend of Schiller, whom he had met on the occasion of his previous visit. In an interesting letter to Schiller, Körner gives his impression of Goethe which corresponds with Schiller's own. His manner of address, he says, was cold and repellant; though in a subsequent letter he adds that he found him more communicative than he expected. By the first week of October, after an absence of more than two months, Goethe was back in Weimar, rejoiced, he told Herder, that he again would have the opportunity of taking

<sup>1</sup> *Die Mystifizierten*, which afterwards grew into the *Gross-Cophta*.



an evening meal with him and of being once more by the side of his "*Mädchen*."

The year 1791 Goethe describes as "a peaceful year spent at home." It was also a memorable year in his life, as it saw him committed to two labours, one of which was to engage much of his time and energies during the following twenty-six years, while the other was to the close of his career to absorb his intellect and his feelings as no other of his manifold interests absorbed him. In May, 1791, he undertook the management of a new theatre in Weimar which had been built the previous year. We have seen the lively interest which he had taken in theatrical entertainments during the earlier years of his stay at the Weimar Court. As the original ducal theatre had been burnt down two years before his arrival, an amateur company, composed of members of the Court, had been formed, and he had written a succession of pieces for their performance. The amateur players had wearied of their amusement, and in 1784 a professional company had settled in the town and had purveyed entertainment till 1790, when the new theatre was built. The manager of the company having then decided to leave Weimar, a new manager had to be found, and Goethe, with his belief in the educative influence of the stage, gladly undertook the post. He threw himself with characteristic thoroughness into the laborious task which was to make such large demands on his time for so many years to come. To every detail connected with theatrical management he gave his scrupulous care. He personally took in hand the training of the actors and actresses, insisting on absolute obedience to the directions he thought proper to give them. Shortcomings and delinquencies on the part of the individual members of the company were severely censured, and with so high a hand did he exercise his authority that the Duke jestingly called him "a petty tyrant." He even insisted on a becoming demeanour on the part

of the audience. When a foolish play of Friedrich Schlegel was being acted and the audience were showing signs of amusement, he rose from his seat and thundered, "No laughing!" What made his labours more arduous was the scantiness of the materials with which he had to work. Stage accessories were miserably deficient, and he had so meagre a supply of actors that the chief of them had to take several parts and the theatre attendants had to complete the list of the *dramatis personæ*.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in spite of these disadvantages, Goethe succeeded in giving such effect to his ideals that the theatre of Weimar came to be the first in Germany, and to its exemplar it is mainly due that theatrical representations fill so important a rôle in the life of the German people.

The other interest which began to preoccupy Goethe in the same year, 1791, lay in the sphere in which he had already expended so much of his energies—the sphere of natural science. We have seen how absorbed he had been in anatomical studies during his journeys to Venice and Silesia. He now turned his attention to another department of science, and, as not infrequently happens in the lives of mortals, it was an accident that awoke his interest in a subject which was to hold the first place in his thoughts and to evoke his liveliest emotions during the rest of his life. Always interested in the art of painting, he was led by the glowing landscape of Italy, as he saw it in his first visit to that country, to give special attention to the nature of colours, and on his return he had borrowed a set of prisms and other optical instruments with the intention of making experiments for himself. He had left the instruments untouched till May, 1791, when, on their being reclaimed by their owner, he made a hasty experiment which resulted in what he considered a remarkable discovery. On looking through a prism at a white wall he expected, in accordance with

<sup>1</sup> The theatre did not pay its way, and the Duke had to subsidize it.

what he supposed to be the Newtonian theory of light, to see the wall variegated with different colours ; but what he actually saw was that the wall remained of a uniform white. Ignorant of the fact that what Newton really said was that only the edges of a white surface, viewed through a prism, were coloured, he hastily concluded that Newton was wrong. Irremediably convinced, however, that Newton was in error, Goethe began a course of observation and experiment which ended only with his life.

The story of Goethe's attempt to convince the world of the truth of his own theory that light is homogeneous, as against the Newtonian theory that it is heterogeneous, belongs to the history of optical science. What is of interest so far as his biography is concerned is the fact that one half of his life was spent under a delusion of which the world is now aware. To no other work, not even to *Faust*, the greatest birth of his genius, did he give such a measure of time and toil as to the demonstration that Newton's theory was founded on error. The temper in which he conducted the long controversy in which he now found himself engaged is no less noteworthy. Of Newton he came to speak in terms of personal animosity, and in prose and verse denounced him as one of the world's false teachers.<sup>1</sup> As contemporary men of science almost unanimously rejected his view,<sup>2</sup> he sweepingly attributed their blindness to the inherent pedantry and bigotry of a professional caste. Indeed, to express a doubt of the truth of his own conclusion was to risk a breach of friendly relations with him. In explanation of this seemingly blind perversity on the part of Goethe, it is to be remembered that in his view it was not only the acceptance of his particular theory of colours that was at stake, but his fundamental conception

<sup>1</sup> It would not have raised Newton in Goethe's estimation had he known that Newton called poetry "ingenious trifling" and statues "stone dolls."

<sup>2</sup> Two great philosophers, Hegel and Schopenhauer, accepted Goethe's theory.





of the processes of nature. In these processes, as he conceived them, the simplest means are invariably employed to effect nature's ends, and his insuperable objection to the Newtonian theory was that it contradicted nature's universal methods. Thus bantered by his destiny, Goethe gave his toil and his marvellous powers to the propagation of a delusion. Yet, though the main thesis of the writings which he devoted to the promulgation of his theory, is based on a misconception, they contain passages unsurpassed in any of his prose productions. His two expositions, entitled, *Beiträge zur Optik*,<sup>1</sup> published respectively in 1791 and 1792, have pages which only a great poet could have written, and in the historical portion of his *Farbenlehre* (1810) we have the unique spectacle of an intellectual peer judging the thinkers of ancient and modern times who have made the greatest contributions to human progress.

To the same period of which we are speaking belongs a newly-awakened interest of Goethe, which he himself emphatically notes as exercising a distinctive influence on his future thinking. This new interest lay in a sphere in which by nature he never found himself at home—the sphere of abstract speculation. In the course of his miscellaneous reading in youth he had met with Brücker's *History of Philosophy*, in which, he says, he had browsed with delight, but with such vague impressions, that he compared himself to one who had gazed all his life on the stars without knowing anything of astronomy. At a later date he had made acquaintance with a philosopher whom he had read with intelligence and from whom he had derived satisfaction both for his intellect and for his feelings. In Frankfort during his early twenties, and subsequently in Weimar, he had found in Spinoza

<sup>1</sup> Of the first of these *Beiträge*, he says that they “mit schlechtem Dank und hohlen Redensarten der Schule beiseite geschoben wurden.”

conceptions of nature and of man's attitude to life which appealed to his own deepest instincts.

On his return from his first Italian journey, however, he found the world around him interested in another philosopher, of whose teaching he had already heard, but with whose writings he had hitherto made only a cursory acquaintance. In Jena which, rather than Weimar, he regarded as his intellectual home, the philosophy of Kant was being enthusiastically taught by Professor Reinhold, a son-in-law of Wieland, who had made a convert of Schiller among others. Goethe, as we have seen, was not yet on terms of intimacy with Schiller, and it was his own independent curiosity that led him to turn to Kant with the object of discovering if the new philosophy had any message for himself. For philosophy in a technical sense, he tells us, he had no "organ."<sup>1</sup> He had listened to talk about Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which had appeared in 1781, but he had concluded that it "lay wholly beyond the sphere of his own interests." It was another work of Kant, the *Critique of Judgment*, just published (1790), to which he first gave his serious attention. The larger import of the Kantian philosophy as a whole was to be pressed upon him at a later date, and specially during the period of his close intercourse with Schiller, but at this point we are only concerned with the particular doctrine of Kant which now interested him and to which he makes contemporary reference.<sup>2</sup>

The *Critique of Judgment* appeared in 1790, and in the course of that year Goethe read it. To his

<sup>1</sup> Goethe had also no "organ" for mathematics.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe notes that Kant gave no signs of interest in himself.

Perhaps, however, Kant had *Götz von Berlichingen* and its imitations in his eye when he wrote the following passage: "Da nun die Originalität des Talents ein (aber nicht das einzige) wesentliches Stück vom Character des Genies ausmacht: so glauben seichte Köpfe, das sie nicht besser zeigen können, sie wären aufblühende Genies, als wenn sie sich vom Schulzwange aller Regeln lossagen und glauben, man paradiere besser auf einem kollerichten Pferde als auf einem Schulpferde." Kant, it may be added, expressed high admiration for Schiller.

unexpected pleasure he found in it the confirmation of conceptions which had long been in his own mind, though unsystematized. "Kant's book," he wrote in October to his musical friend Reichardt, "has given me great pleasure, and has induced me to turn to his earlier writings." When, in the same autumn, he met Schiller's friend Körner in Dresden, their talk was mainly of Kant. "He has found food for his philosophy," Körner wrote to Schiller, "in Kant's critical examination of the teleological judgment." And in reply to Körner's letter Schiller has some remarks which may be taken as defining Goethe's permanent attitude to all abstract thinking. "It is interesting," Schiller wrote, "to observe how he [Goethe] clothes everything in his own way and fashion, and reproduces in the most surprising manner what he has read; but I should not care to argue with him about things in which I am really interested. He is altogether lacking in the hearty manner of revealing himself on any subject whatever. For him all philosophy is subjective, and that means the end of conviction and of argument. His philosophy, too, is not wholly to my liking; it draws too much from the sensible world, whereas I draw from the soul. . . . But his spirit works and searches in all directions, and strives to construct a whole—and for me that makes him a great man." When Schiller here says that Goethe's philosophy was too much drawn from the sensible world, he was saying only what Goethe himself consistently declared—that for him the truth of all speculation was to be tested by its accordance with what he observed to be the processes alike of nature and of art.

In the conclusions which he drew from his reading of Kant at this time we have an illustration of his method of dealing with all the philosophers to whom at one time or another he gave his attention. From Spinoza he had only appropriated what in that thinker appealed to and confirmed his own experience, and he now treated Kant in the same manner.



In a sentence which we are to regard as having been spoken at this time,<sup>1</sup> he explains what his recent study of Kant had specifically given him. During a journey, which will presently be noted, he met an interesting young schoolmaster with whom he had some pleasant conversations, and who, like many others, expressed his surprise that Goethe had abandoned poetry for science. As the schoolmaster was a student of Kant, Goethe considered that he could best explain his change of interests by an appeal to that thinker, and, as he reports his own words, he spoke as follows: "When Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* places the teleological judgment beside the æsthetic, it shows that what he meant to indicate was this: a work of art should be treated as a work of Nature and a work of Nature as a work of art, and the value of each should be developed out of itself and considered in itself."<sup>2</sup>

We see what pleasure and encouragement Goethe would find in the opinion of Kant which he thus expounds. From the time he had seriously addressed himself to nature studies, the world in general as well as his most intimate friends had deplored the misdirection of his genius. Now he received the assurance of a great thinker that the functions of the poet and the man of science were not disparate, but that, on the contrary, their attitude to their respective subjects should be the same, and that the gifts needful for the highest work in both were fundamentally alike. Kant's conception "that a work of art should be treated as a work of Nature and a work of Nature as a work of art" was, however, no new revelation to Goethe. Notably since his first Italian journey the idea had underlain all his efforts in his studies of nature and of art alike. It was his deep conviction that to the production of a poem

<sup>1</sup> *Campagne in Frankreich*, October 25, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Critique of Judgment* Kant has this sentence: "Die Natur war schön, wenn sie zugleich als Kunst aussah, und die Kunst kann nur schön genannt werden, wenn wir uns bewusst sind, sie sei Kunst, und sie uns doch als Natur aussieht."

and to the making of a scientific discovery the same faculty was needful—the imaginative reason. For him, therefore, there was no incongruity between the labour that went to the creation of *Faust* and the labour that resulted in the discoveries of the metamorphosis of plants, of the intermaxillary bone, and of the relation between the skull and the vertebra.<sup>1</sup>

It was in these new interests that Goethe was engaged during his “peaceful year at home,” extending from October, 1791, to August, 1792.<sup>2</sup> Less peacefully were to be spent the two following years—years among the most momentous in human history, the events of which for Goethe, as for all thinking men, betokened the beginning of a new phase in man’s destiny.

<sup>1</sup> In the course of the same journey in which he had the talk with the young schoolmaster he also met a Prince Reuss, who expressed his surprise that he preferred to speak of science rather than of tragedies and novels, and Goethe’s comment is: “Denn es ging mir mit diesen Entwicklungen natürlicher Phänomene wie mit Gedichten; ich machte sie nicht sondern sie machten mich.”—*Campagne in Frankreich*, August 30, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> In connection with the various pursuits of Goethe that have been noted should be mentioned his founding of the *Freitagsgesellschaft* (July, 1791), which at first met at the Duchess Amalia’s, but subsequently at Goethe’s house in the Frauenplan. Wieland, Herder, Knebel, and others were members of it, but Goethe was its emanating spirit. The subjects discussed ranged over science, literature, and art.





Warum stehen sie davor? Kommen sie getrost herein.  
 Ist nicht Thüre da und Thor? Werden wohl empfangen seyn.  
 Goethe 1782

GOETHE'S HOUSE IN WEIMAR.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### GOETHE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

WHILE Goethe was passing his "peaceful year" in Weimar, Europe was witnessing events unprecedented in its history. In the summer of 1789, while he was writing his epigrams and pursuing his scientific investigations in Venice, the French Revolution had broken out, and the National Assembly had subsequently run its course. France, having overthrown her ancient constitution, now found herself threatened by a coalition of foreign enemies. In 1792 she declared war against the Emperor of Austria on his refusal to expel the French *émigrés* who were endeavouring to stir up hostilities against her, and this action was to involve Goethe in an experience strangely alien to all his natural instincts. The Austrian Emperor prepared to invade France, in alliance with the King of Prussia, with the object of crushing the Revolution and restoring Louis XVI. to his throne; and, as the Duke of Weimar commanded a brigade in the Prussian army, he was bound to take his part in the campaign. But, as already observed, the Duke seems to have regarded Goethe as an indispensable companion on such expeditions, and when, in June, 1792, he set out for the camp of the Allies, it was on the understanding that Goethe should join him at a later date.

In the second week of August, Goethe left Weimar, provided, as he tells us, with his MSS. on optics, a lexicon of physical science, and a map of the country which was to be the scene of the Allies' operations. On the 12th he was in Frankfort, where he saw his

mother for the first time after an interval of thirteen years. So far as we know, there had not been a shadow of misunderstanding between the two, and their meeting, it would appear, gave equal pleasure to both. Yet, though she lived for other sixteen years, Goethe visited her only thrice during that period. His neglect has been attributed to lack of filial affection due to a natural coldness of heart, though we may remember that another great man, not usually supposed to be devoid of the milk of human kindness, is open to the same charge. Dr. Johnson for many years did not visit his mother at Lichfield, an easier journey from London than to Frankfort from Weimar, and did not even make an effort to see her during her last illness. Johnson's worshipper, Boswell, pleads in his excuse, "his literary labours which confined him to London," and if absorbing occupations are to be held as a sufficient excuse for filial neglect, Goethe may have the benefit in at least as great measure as Johnson. But there may be another explanation of Goethe's apparent neglect of filial duty: a sojourn in Frankfort was a weariness to him. In a letter to his friend Jacobi, written during his present stay there, he told him that it was pleasant to be among his old friends again, but that he found the continual recurrence of the same themes in their conversation so tedious that he longed to be back to his house and garden among the Thuringian hills.

He had, however, no such pleasant prospect immediately before him. On August 20 he left Frankfort, and by way of Mainz, Trèves, and Luxembourg, joined the camp of the Allies at Longwy which had been treacherously surrendered to them. As he describes his state of mind in entering on the campaign, it was one of complete indifference to the issues that were at stake. In the letter to Jacobi just referred to he said that the fate of "aristocratic or democratic sinners" gave him no concern; and on his journey to the camp he showed such an



open mind in his conversations with the persons he met that a postmaster took him for a republican and directed his attention to the traces of the barbarities of the Prussian soldiery.

It was in the full confidence of victory that the Allies—Prussians, Austrians, and *émigrés*, led by Frederick William, King of Prussia, and the Duke of Brunswick—had begun their march into France.<sup>1</sup> Frederick was reported to have said that he would convert France into an “ashheap.” He was to be miserably undeceived. From the beginning of the campaign it rained so incessantly that the jest went that Jupiter must be a Jacobin. After a toilsome march over roads almost impassable the Allies reached Verdun, to which they immediately laid siege—Goethe, while it proceeded, being specially interested in the beautiful prismatic colours in a neighbouring spring. After a two days’ bombardment, the treachery of a body of its citizens compelled its surrender by its Jacobin commander Beaurepaire, who shot himself immediately after signing the terms of capitulation—a significant indication, as Goethe remarks, of the spirit that now animated France. The easy capture of Verdun seemed to confirm the prediction of the *émigrés* that the French people would welcome the Allies as deliverers, and, sharing the general confidence, Goethe wrote to Christiane that within a few days they would be in Paris whence she might expect something of that city’s haberdashery.

In weather somewhat improved the Allies continued their march to Valmy, Goethe riding with the regular troops as a safer and more honourable position than with the baggage-train.<sup>2</sup> At Valmy

<sup>1</sup> Goethe relates the incidents of the campaign in his *Campagne in Frankreich*, based on his notes made at the time, and with additions from subsequent information. It was prepared for publication in 1820–21.

<sup>2</sup> He had hitherto travelled in a light carriage drawn by four horses. A Prussian officer of artillery, who came in contact with Goethe during the campaign, describes him as exquisitely dressed and looking more like a prince than a burgher-secretary. At the Duke of Weimar’s mess one day

the invaders found themselves in a dangerous predicament. Dumouriez, the commander of the French army, had taken up a position at Ste. Meneshould, to the east of Valmy, on the flank of the Allies, and thus cut them off from the frontier. Here he was joined by Kellermann with another body of troops, which increased his numbers to 76,000 as against 70,000 of the enemy. On September 19 the two armies engaged, and in the course of the battle Goethe deliberately sought to ascertain what "cannon-fever" was like, by riding among the shot of the enemy. The issue of the day was a serious reverse for the Allies, and it was during the bivouac at night that Goethe made his famous remark on its portentous import. "Here and now begins a new era in the world's history, and you can say that you were present at its birth."<sup>1</sup> Two days later the French Republic was founded, and the way was opened for events that were to astonish the world.

The Allies were now in a precarious position. After the defeat at Valmy, further advance was impossible and retreat was their only course. But an unmolested retreat had been secured only on condition of their surrendering the places they had taken. By the same way as they had come their withdrawal began, and it was conducted under pitiable circumstances. Sickness, which had been prevalent since the beginning of the invasion, became general; the weather was worse than ever, and the roads were so hopeless that the troops had to make their way through the fields as best they could. In all these hardships Goethe had his share. He

Goethe was laying down the law on the subject of artillery when the officer bluntly told him that he did not know what he was talking about. Goethe blushed, but, recovering himself, gave a good-natured reply.

<sup>1</sup> In *La Revue Hebdomadaire* (December 18, 1915) M. Arthur Chuquet endeavours to prove that Goethe did not utter these words at the time, but added them as an afterthought in his narrative of the campaign. He omits to observe that, in another narrative, the *Siege of Mainz*, composed at the same time as the *Campaign in France*, Goethe mentions that a few months later, during the siege of Mainz, his words were recalled to him by the officers to whom they were spoken.

suffered from the prevalent sickness, lost his carriage which contained his optical observations and other belongings, and did not recover it for some days. Throughout the campaign he had made a point of inspiring his comrades by his lively talk, but they noted that even he had now lost his usual spirits. Yet he does not omit to tell us that at Grandpré, a specially trying spot in the line of retreat, he found solace in reading his science lexicon.

By way of Longwy, Verdun, and Luxembourg the broken host at length reached German ground at Trèves, where Goethe found himself free to direct his own movements. Here he received a proposal which he seems to have regarded as of special interest, if we may judge from the long digression he devotes to it in his narrative of the campaign. His maternal uncle, Councillor Textor of Frankfort, had just died, and it occurred to Goethe's friends there that he might be disposed to succeed to his office. Accordingly they commissioned his mother to ask if he would offer himself for election. He did not reply for two months, but the delay implied no hesitation as to his decision. Shortly after his original settlement in Weimar he had told his mother that the bourgeois life of Frankfort was no longer possible for him, and we have just seen how he had found even a few days there a weariness. He civilly declined the offer, therefore, with the full approval of his mother, who in her reply told him that he was essentially a *Freiherr* and that it would be imprudent for him to enter on a new course of life.

It had been Goethe's intention to revisit his mother on his way home, but this was rendered impossible as the French had crossed the Rhine and were now in possession of Frankfort.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly,

<sup>1</sup> Goethe invited his mother to Weimar, but, steadfast in her "Old Testament faith," she refused to leave Frankfort. The exactions of the French, however, compelled her to sell the family house, with pictures, wine-cellar, etc., and to find another residence.



taking boat at Trèves, he sailed down the Moselle to Coblenz, narrowly escaping shipwreck, though at the moment of greatest danger he represents himself as plunged in contemplation. From Coblenz, in a hired boat (which proved dangerously leaky), he descended the Rhine to Düsseldorf—a place which brought a flood of memories to his mind. Not far off was Pempelfort, the home of Fritz Jacobi, with whom eighteen years before he had spent some days of intimate spiritual communing which both had noted as marking an epoch in their intellectual life. In the narrative which we are following he pauses to reflect on the mental and spiritual transformation he had undergone since those days of youthful enthusiasm. In the few weeks he now spent with Jacobi at Pempelfort, varied by visits to Düsseldorf, it was brought home to him how deep was the gulf by which they had come to be parted. Jacobi and the other friends whom he met with him, he says, hardly recognized him. Natural science, the subject which absorbed most of his thoughts, made no appeal to Jacobi, with his belief in a special faculty that transcends science and is capable of revealing the mysteries of things. But both were men of the world, and they found topics on which they discoursed with such mutual pleasure that they parted as old friends, though each in his heart knew that their ways must continue to diverge.

His next stopping-place was Duisburg, where he visited the strange being in whom he had been interested some fifteen years before. This was the morbid youth Plessing who had appealed to him for counsel in his mental trouble, and whom he had interviewed in his flying visit to the Harz Mountains in 1777. Plessing had so far recovered health of mind that he was now Professor of Ancient Philosophy, but the impression he made on Goethe was such as to leave the latter apprehensive of his future. Goethe's continued interest in Plessing, it may be said in passing, is another illustration of a marked



trait in his character—a willingness, at his own personal inconvenience, to give what help he could to honestly struggling mortals.

From Duisburg he proceeded to Münster, where he had an experience which must have remained a vivid memory, as he relates it with peculiar effusion. At every period of his life he was attracted by all forms of simple piety. In youth he had been greatly drawn to his mother's friend, Fräulein von Klettenberg of the Moravian community, and later to the mystic, Jung Stillung. Now he voluntarily sought the society of one from whom by all his views of man's life and destiny he was poles apart. In Weimar and elsewhere he had previously met the Princess Gallitzin, a German by birth, but married to a Russian prince, and it was with this lady that he chose to sojourn for a time in Münster. The Princess had had a varied spiritual history. She had begun as a woman of the world, but had come under the influence of Hamann, the "Magus of the North," who had inspired Herder and had always interested Goethe. So close was the bond between them that she took Hamann under her own roof, and on his death buried him in her garden. Hamann had died four years before Goethe's visit, and since his death the lady had come under new influences and was now a devout Catholic, surrounded by persons of the same communion. Goethe, who had found himself at home among Bohemian artists at Rome, on his own evidence found himself equally at home in this pious circle, and the remarkable thing is that the Princess and her friends were fully aware of his opinions on all that they held sacred. He found, indeed, that he could talk with greater freedom and on a greater range of subjects than with Jacobi and his friends. He was listened to with interest when he spoke of his scientific investigations, and his Italian experiences evoked an intelligent sympathy which he had failed to find in Weimar. It was characteristic that he described the various Church

ceremonies he had seen in Rome with such feeling that one of his hearers asked the Princess in a whisper if he were really a Catholic. One result of Goethe's visit to the Princess was that it added still another to the list of his manifold interests. She had in her possession a rare collection of carved gems, and Goethe evinced such a lively curiosity in them that she insisted on his taking them with him for further study.<sup>1</sup> It was with mutual feelings of the highest regard that he, the Neo-pagan, and she, the Catholic mystic, at length parted. She had been warned before his coming, she told him, that he was a dangerous person, yet her parting words to him were that they might meet again, if not in this, in the next world. "I see no reason," is his characteristic reflection on this pious wish, "why I should find fault with any one who wishes to draw me into his sphere, where alone, according to his conviction, it is possible to live in tranquillity and to die quietly in the same life of eternal blessedness."

On December 16, after an absence of four months, Goethe reached Weimar, in circumstances, he notes, which would have brightened the darkest scene in a novel. His arrival took place at midnight when he found Christiane and his boy comfortably settled in the house which was henceforth to be his permanent home. It was the house in the Frauenplan which the Duke had originally rented and afterwards purchased for him, and which by his order had been prepared for occupation during Goethe's absence, yet with such details left unfinished as Goethe might prefer to arrange at his own pleasure. With the accommodation now at his disposal he was able to take in as his housemate Heinrich Meyer,<sup>2</sup> whose help and counsel he had found so invaluable during his residence in Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Goethe subsequently became an assiduous collector of gems on his own account, and made them a special study.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer acted as teacher and director of the Weimar Drawing-school, and resided with Goethe till his marriage in 1802.

The next five months Goethe spent quietly at home, mainly occupied with the theatre and his optical studies. In May, 1793, he was summoned to a new experience of war. The King of Prussia was preparing to lay siege to Mainz, then in possession of the French, and the Duke had to take part in the attempt. On May 10 Goethe left Weimar, and, passing through Frankfort,<sup>1</sup> which had been evacuated by the French, joined the army besieging Mainz. As during the campaign in France, he followed the operations with interest, but throughout the siege his attention was concentrated on his own studies—in further writing on optical questions and in the completion of a literary work he then had in hand. The actual bombardment of the town began on June 27, and its capitulation took place on July 23, with attendant circumstances which anew impressed Goethe with the spiritual forces that had been evoked by the Revolution. From a window in the toll-house of the town he witnessed the French evacuation and he thus describes the spectacle.

“A column of Marseillais, small black-looking men, dressed in rags of all colours, came tramping along, as if king Edwin had opened his mountain, and sent out the lively host of dwarfs. Regular troops followed, grave and sullen, but neither down-cast nor ashamed. But the most remarkable apparition, which struck everybody, was, when the *chasseurs à cheval* rode up; they had come near to where we were in perfect silence, when, all at once, their band began to play the Marseillaise hymn. This revolutionary *Te Deum* has at all times something melancholy and ominous about it, however briskly it may be played; but they now played it quite slow, suiting well with the creeping pace at which they rode. It was impressive and fearful; and it was a solemn sight when the troopers approached, long, lanky veterans, whose mien also accorded with the music: singly you might have compared them with

<sup>1</sup> Where he again saw his mother.



Don Quixote ; united they appeared highly venerable.”<sup>1</sup>

An incident that occurred during the evacuation and in which Goethe himself was the leading actor is another illustration of that resolution and promptness of action which he exemplified when threatened with shipwreck in his crossing from Sicily to Naples. While gazing from the toll-house window at the departing garrison, he saw a man and woman, evidently persons of note, in danger of their lives from an infuriated mob. Rushing out of doors, he vehemently addressed the crowd, reminding them that no disturbance could be permitted in the vicinity of the Duke of Weimar’s quarters, and, at serious risk to himself, succeeded in preventing them from carrying out their purpose. When the rashness of his action in risking his life for one who might be a criminal for aught he knew was pointed out to him, he replied that he only acted according to his nature “which would rather permit him to commit an injustice than suffer disorder.”

The army having now accomplished its object, Goethe was free to return home, where, after a short stay with his brother-in-law Schlosser, and a renewed visit to Frankfort, he arrived on August 22 after an absence of over three months.

Goethe had seen and experienced in his own person the results of the forces let loose by the French Revolution. What were the predominant feelings it awoke in him, and what was his permanent attitude to the course it ran ? In the Venetian epigrams already quoted we have the expression of his first instinctive feeling when the news of the proceedings of the French States-General reached him. All apostles of freedom, he wrote, had ever been hateful to him. Yet there had been a time when Goethe himself had been regarded as a revolutionary of

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Robert Farie, Lond., 1849.

dangerous type. In literature, his *Götz von Berlichingen* had been a defiance of existing conventions, and had evoked a swarm of imitations which had excited the contempt and indignation of Kant. His *Werther* had sent a shudder through respectable German society as a specious attack on the very foundations of morality and of human responsibility. In politics, also, he had expressed himself in an equally revolutionary spirit ; the last words he puts in the mouth of *Götz* are a cry for liberty, and in his mother's house he, with the brothers Stolberg, had vehemently expressed his desire for the blood of all tyrants.

But since these wild days Goethe had "submitted to a new control." As the result alike of his actual experience of life and of his inner development, he had arrived at conceptions regarding all that concerns the well-being of the individual and of humanity which divided him by a gulf from his former self. When the French Revolution broke upon the world, he had been for fourteen years the honoured friend and guest of a prince, in whom, with all his shortcomings, he saw a ruler genuinely interested in the welfare of his people. His own experience as an administrator, too, had disposed him to regard respect for the powers that be as the best safeguard for a progressive society. As a courtier and, we may say, with the instincts of a courtier, he was thus averse to all movements that would strike at the foundation of existing arrangements. And his inner development had confirmed him in these convictions. What the results of that development had been for him, has already been indicated. In the domains of art and literature self-restraint and repose were the ideals after which he who would achieve the highest effects must strive. And his investigations of nature had led him to similar conclusions ; her results, also, were attained not by violent breaks in her working, but by gradual processes, by evolution and not by revolution.

Goethe had thus ceased to be a revolutionary after the type of his earlier days, but, in truth, he was now, and with reasoned conviction, more profoundly revolutionary than he had ever been. In Rome he had written: "Nor will I rest now until nothing is mere word and tradition for me any more, but everything a living conception."<sup>1</sup> In taking such an attitude to all human experience Goethe was at the point of view of the most advanced modern thought, and it is precisely as the first great representative of this point of view that he has his supreme place in the line of modern thinkers.<sup>2</sup> And in his own estimate of the work he accomplished for the world it is the freeing of men's minds from routine thinking that he emphasizes as his main achievement. In his latest years, in words frequently quoted, he thus expressed the debt which he thought his own nation owed him: "If I were to say what I had really been to the Germans in general and to the young German poets in particular, I should say I had been their liberator."

This was the mission, then, that Goethe set before himself on his return from Italy. It was not to make proselytes or to impose convictions by authority, but to train serious searchers after truth, capable of analysing their own thought and experience, and of attaining independent conclusions. Such being his ideal, the gospel proclaimed by the French Revolution necessarily appeared to him both superficial and mischievous.<sup>3</sup> Even if its doctrines of the equality of men and government by the people were realized, it would not result in making

<sup>1</sup> So in one of his *Xenien* he says:—

"Dass ich Natur und Kunst zu schauen mich treulich bestrebe,  
Dass kein Name mich täuscht, dass mich kein Dogma beschränkt."

<sup>2</sup> George Meredith calls Goethe "that great figure of modern manhood," *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (Lond., 1906), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> In his own well-known phrase, the Revolution, like the Reformation, "gave a set-back to quiet culture." In his later years, it should be said, he spoke warmly of the beneficent results of the Reformation, and called Luther one of the world's great liberators.



mankind wiser and better. Their passions and modes of thinking would remain the same, and they would be led to seek in external conditions the comfort and happiness which only self-discipline can give the individual. Goethe's permanent feeling towards the Revolution, therefore, was irritation—irritation at what he considered its mischievous tendencies, and irritation at its thwarting of his own ideals.

He would fain have put it out of his thoughts and gone his own way in peace, but it was impossible even for him to ignore the commotion in the world around him. Even in his own immediate circle the ferment was working ominously: the friends with whom he hitherto had most in common—Wieland, Herder, and Knebel—openly proclaimed their sympathies with the revolutionary doctrines. In spite of himself, he could not hold himself aloof from the movement which was absorbing all men's minds: the French Revolution, he told Jacobi, had been a revolution for him also. In the past it had been his invariable habit to seek relief from inner disturbance by giving it expression in some literary form, and it was the same impulse that now prompted the succession of pieces of which the Revolution is more or less the theme. These pieces, however, had no such simple inspiration behind them as that which produced *Götz* and *Werther*. They were the product of divided emotions, in which irritation and lack of sympathy were predominant, and they were, therefore, foredoomed to failure as works of literary art. The world would have been no loser, had he never written them; but, as part of his biography, they have their interest as an example, not the first in Goethe's career, of misdirected genius.

The earliest of them, the *Gross-Cophta*, is not directly concerned with the Revolution. Its plot is based on the story of the Diamond Necklace, in which the arch-charlatan Cagliostro played one of his many parts. As far back as 1781 Goethe had been interested

in Cagliostro, and he had followed with the closest attention the famous trial in which the reputation of Marie Antoinette had been compromised. During his stay in Palermo, in the course of his Italian journey, his curiosity had led him to visit Cagliostro's relations resident there, and to make inquiries regarding his antecedents. What had impressed him in reading the account of the trial was its revelation of a depth of depravity among the upper classes in France that betokened a society ripe for dissolution. Such being his impression of the portentous significance of the trial, it is curious that, when he chose it as a theme for literary treatment, he first cast it in the form of a musical play.<sup>1</sup> Begun in Italy, he completed it on his return to Germany, but dissatisfied with the result he rewrote it (1791) as a comedy for the Weimar theatre, of which he was now director. In the drama, as we have it, the serious reflections which the circumstances of the trial had awakened in Goethe have no place; it is simply a satire on impostors and on the folly of persons who are fooled by them. Under changed designations the leading personages in the comedy play the same parts as their historic originals. The Graf is Cagliostro; the Princess, Marie Antoinette; the Domherr, Cardinal de Rohan; the Marquise, the adventuress de Lamotte. The development turns on the intrigues of the Graf and the Marquise to attain their respective ends. To complete the delusion of his dupes the Graf announces the coming of the Gross-Cophta, and in the end gives himself out as that mysterious personage. The object of the Marquise who, though professing to be a believer in the Graf, regards him as a charlatan, is to gain possession of the diamond necklace, and she follows the same tactics as her original, de Lamotte. She persuades the Domherr that the Princess is in love with him and that he will secure her affections by presenting her with the necklace. He purchases the necklace and the

<sup>1</sup> *Die Mystificierten.*



Marquise arranges an interview between him and the Princess, for whom she substitutes her own niece. One of the Graf's dupes, the Ritter, gets wind of the Marquise's arrangements, and reports them to the authorities, with the result that in the final scene the Marquise, the Graf, and all their dupes are arrested by the officers of justice. It will be seen to what company the *Gross-Cophta* introduces us—a company of dupes and knaves in which there is no single reputable character. In this respect it bears a resemblance to Goethe's early comedy, *Die Mitschuldigen*, but while that comedy is partially redeemed by its sprightliness and humour, in the *Gross-Cophta* there is little of either. Its general reception was convincing proof that the play had missed its mark. The Duke disliked it; it fell flat on its first representation in Weimar; and in Leipzig, where it was also produced, it raised a tumult in the audience.<sup>1</sup> That, after *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, Goethe should have written such a thing as the *Gross-Cophta* can only be regarded as one more proof of the perturbing influence of the Revolution on his susceptible temperament.<sup>2</sup>

A second play belonging to the same period, the *Bürgergeneral*, deals directly with the French Revolution, and illustrates Goethe's permanent feeling regarding it. Composed in three days in April, 1793, it was inspired, he tells us, by the spread of revolutionary opinions in Germany, and may be taken, he adds, as evidence of "the irritable and whimsical humour" with which this alarming symptom filled him. In writing it he was aware that he was taking some risk, as his treatment of his theme would run counter to popular feeling, and he expressed the hope that he might not have to regret its production either "on æsthetic or on political grounds." A brief sketch of the piece will be sufficient to indicate

<sup>1</sup> In his *Campagne in Frankreich* Goethe says that his *Gross-Cophta* gave pain to Jacobi and his circle.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe sent the proceeds of the *Gross-Cophta* to the poor relations of Cagliostro at Palermo.

its tone and tendency. It is a comedy in one act with fourteen scenes, and was suggested by two French models which had proved a success in the Weimar theatre. There are four leading characters—Röse and Görde, a newly-married couple, happy and contented in their peasant life; Märten, the father of Röse, a foolish old man, who reads the newspapers and is childishly interested in the Revolution, and Schnaps the village barber, whose character and doings provide what amusement is to be found in the play. Schnaps gives himself out as an important agent in the Revolution, commissioned by its leaders in Paris to propagate its doctrines in the village and neighbourhood. In old Märten he finds a ready gull, but it is at his peril that he visits him, as Görde, indignant at Schnaps' behaviour to Röse, has threatened to cudgel him. Schnaps contrives to find Märten alone, however, and there follow scenes, the express object of which is to throw ridicule on would-be revolutionaries. Schnaps announces that he has been appointed "Bürgergeneral," and out of his barber's bag he produces a French uniform in which he arrays himself. Görde appears, and Schnaps takes refuge in the hayloft, whence, after Görde leaves, he emerges covered with hay. To impress Märten with his importance he proceeds to illustrate impending military operations with various articles in Röse's cupboard, which to Märten's dismay he forces open. This is too much even for Märten, and a struggle ensues between them during which Görde reappears and administers chastisement to Schnaps who escapes by a back door. Röse then joins Märten and Görde, and is horrified to find the state of her cupboard. But a new dread seizes all three; the din has attracted the attention of their neighbours, and they are alarmed lest they should be taken for revolutionaries. Their fears are justified, for the judge appears attended by a crowd of villagers, finds convincing proof of their guilty intentions, and resolves to make an example of them.

At this moment, however, a nobleman, friendly to Görges and Rösse, opportunely turns up, and from their story is assured of their innocence. In the final scene we have the moral which Goethe intended to convey in his farce. Schnaps, brought in by a band of peasants, confesses that he had obtained the uniform from a wounded French prisoner, and the nobleman, speaking Goethe's own mind, administers warning advice to all present. Their best counsel, he tells them, is for each to mind his own business, to leave public affairs alone, and to do his best to be happy himself and to make others happy. The *Bürgergeneral* is more entertaining than the *Gross-Cophta*, but it raises our wonder that Goethe could treat a world-shattering movement in this spirit, and imagine that by such things he could stem the tide of revolutionary feeling in Germany. Yet it found more favour than the *Gross-Cophta*. It was approved by Jacobi, Wieland, Herder, and even by Schiller, and it was applauded in the theatre of well-disciplined Weimar. On the other hand, by German readers in general it was regarded, as Goethe anticipated, as ill-timed and ill-judged fooling.<sup>1</sup>

A more serious performance than the *Bürgergeneral* is *Die Aufgeregten* described as a "political drama," and also dealing with conditions produced by the French Revolution. The scene is a German village whose inhabitants have been affected by revolutionary opinions, and who have, moreover, a special complaint against their landed superior. The grandfather of the then lord, who is a minor, had left a deed granting them certain privileges, but the original document had disappeared and the copy of it was null in law. The leading character in the play is a surgeon-barber, not an absolute fool like Schnaps in the *Bürgergeneral*, but, though somewhat vain-glorious, a man of action who had served under

<sup>1</sup> Goethe says that he meant the *Bürgergeneral* to be a "shibboleth" to distinguish between true and false patriots.



Frederick the Great. He is an ardent revolutionary, and, as a stroke for the good cause, he persuades a number of the villagers to attack the castle with the object of obtaining the privileges assured to them in the lost deed. The representatives of the family are the Countess (the widow of the late Count), her son Karl, and her daughter Friederike, who is the heroine of the drama. She is a young lady of a modern type, masculine in her tastes, devoted to field sports, and with generous instincts. She suspects the steward of being in possession of the lost deed, presents a gun at his head, and gives him the choice of being shot or of producing the deed, when he prefers the latter alternative. This brings us to the close of the Fourth Act, all that was written of the play, but from the sketch of what was to follow we learn that everything was to end happily for all the persons concerned. The villagers, led by the barber, were to make an attempt on the castle, but, on being assured of the recovery of the deed, they were to return contented to their homes.

From this outline of the play it will be seen that neither in conception nor in execution does it rank with the greater works of Goethe. The theme is petty, and the characters are unimportant. The revolutionary movement is dealt with in a more genial spirit, but in a manner strangely inadequate, as it seems to us, to its portentous import for the future of humanity. But the drama as coming from the hand of Goethe, has an interest apart from its intrinsic merit. In his seventy-fifth year Goethe told his secretary Eckermann that it contained the full expression of his political faith at the time it was written. In the words of two of the characters, the Countess and the Hofrat, we find confirmation of this statement. The Countess had been in Paris and had seen the wild doings there, but had returned with convictions which she thus expresses to the Hofrat: "I have firmly resolved to avoid strictly every act which seems to me unjust, and among my

own people, in society, at court and in the town, to proclaim aloud my view of such actions. In the presence of no injustice will I henceforth be silent, I will tolerate no meanness veiled under a great show, even though I should be decried under the detested name of democrat." This is in the strain of an enlightened aristocrat, and in the reply of the Hofrat we have the point of view of an enlightened bourgeois. It becomes her, he answers, to oppose the faults of those of her own rank, as only those who belong to a particular class in society are in a position to judge it fairly. He himself fully recognized the importance of the nobility in a state, and for that reason he could not tolerate the blind envy and hate of the lower classes against their superiors. If every other advantage—health, beauty, talent, riches, etc.—were to count, why should not the advantage of noble birth? This conviction he would maintain, even though he were called by the detested name of aristocrat. In one of his conversations with Eckermann Goethe defines his original attitude to the revolution in words which may be taken as a commentary on the utterances of the Countess to the Hofrat. He could not be friendly to it, as its horrors touched him too nearly and its beneficial results were not yet discernible. At the same time he was as little a friend of arbitrary government, and it was his conviction that a great revolution was never the fault of the people but of their rulers. He had been denounced as a friend of the powers that be, but the truth was that he approved of existing authority only when it was exercised for the good of the governed. So Goethe spoke in the calmness of retrospect, but, when he wrote the *Bürgergeneral*, we may think that other feelings were uppermost in his mind.

In other writings belonging to the same period as the *Bürgergeneral* Goethe sought relief from the obsession of the French Revolution, but in none of them do we find a conception with the possibilities



of a great work. In *Das Mädchen von Oberkirch*, of which only two scenes were written, the fortunes of a noble family as affected by the Revolution were to be the theme, but the characters, as we have them, give little promise of a powerful appeal either to the intellect or to the emotions. Two other productions, both in prose and one a fragment, only deepen the impression that Goethe's attitude to the whole revolutionary movement made it impossible for him to treat it with the plenitude of his powers. The fragment, entitled, *Reise der Söhne Megaprazons*, seems to have been meant as a political allegory, in which the French Revolution was to be the subject of a general satire.<sup>1</sup> In his *Campaign in France* Goethe has related the fate of the fragment; on reading it aloud to Jacobi and his friends he found that they were so little interested in it, that he left his "wandering family" in any odd haven and the manuscript at the point which it had reached. The other prose work, *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, has but a slight connection with the Revolution. A company of French exiles, who have found a resting-place beyond the Rhine, agree to tell a series of tales by way of distraction from the evil times and their own painful experience. The tales, mostly translated from the Italian, are of a trivial nature, but one of them, of Goethe's own invention, has a special interest for English readers. It is *Das Märchen*, which Carlyle translated with a running commentary, and hailed in a dithyrambic introduction as "one of the notablest performances produced for the last thousand years."<sup>2</sup> What Goethe precisely meant in this allegory or phantasmagory, as Carlyle preferred to call it, is and will remain a mystery. Carlyle gives his own interpre-

<sup>1</sup> The family Megaprazon is represented as descended from Rabelais Pantagruel.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold's judgment on *Das Märchen* is somewhat different from Carlyle's: he describes it as "a piece of solemn inanity, on which a man of Goethe's powers could never have wasted his time, but for his lot having been cast in a nation which has never lived."

tation of it, and succeeding critics have made similar attempts to read its riddle, but with no explanation that has been generally accepted. In his own mind Goethe doubtless attached a symbolical significance to the characters and incidents of the tale, but, as he took no pains to give the world a key to it, we must conclude that he was not greatly concerned that its lessons should be missed. "I hope," he wrote to Schiller, "that the eighteen figures of this drama will be welcome to all riddle-lovers." At every period of his life Goethe was fond of mystification, and it seems to have pleased him that in *Das Märchen* he had achieved such success in the art.

But the most successful and most permanently interesting of Goethe's writings at this time was not an original work. During the campaign in France he came, by what he calls a "strange dispensation," on a copy of a book which had interested him since his early youth. It was the well-known beast-fable of the Middle Ages, *Reineke Fuchs*, which recounts how the fox by his inexhaustible wiles triumphed over all his enemies and became chief minister at the Court of King Lion. It was originally written in Low-German, but had been rendered into High-German prose by Gottsched (1752). When the book came into his hands, he says, he was in a mood to call all men fools or knaves, but here he found human weaknesses and vices presented in such humorous fashion as to put him in a more genial temper. Partly to relieve his own feelings and partly as an exercise in the writing of hexameters, the form of verse he chose, he set himself to translate the fable afresh. Begun in February, 1793, it was finished in May, though it was not published till a year later. His rendering was something between a "translation and a recasting," and was executed with a gusto which we do not feel in his original work of the same period. The eighth canto contains some passages not in the original, one of them a concise

summary of his own political creed.<sup>1</sup> It occurs in the confession of his sins by Reineke to his kinsman the badger, who conducts him to his trial at Court.

Doch das Schlimmste find' ich den Dünkel des irrigen Wahnes,  
Der die Menschen ergreift : es könne jeder im Taumel  
Seines heftigen Wollens die Welt beherrschen und richten.  
Hielte doch jeder sein Weib und seine Kinder in Ordnung,  
Wüsste sein trotzig Gesinde zu bändigen, könnte sich stille,  
Wenn die Thoren verschwenden, in mässigem Leben erfreuen !  
Aber wie sollte die Welt sich verbessern ! Es lässt sich ein jeder  
Alles zu und will mit Gewalt die Andern bezwingen.  
Und so sinken wir tiefer und immer tiefer ins Arge.

Worst of all do I find the conceit of that arrant delusion,  
Which lays hold upon all men, that each of them can in the frenzy  
Of his violent will rule over the world and correct it.  
Would each man but keep his wife and his children in order—  
Would he but check his arrogant servants, he might at his leisure,  
While fools squander, enjoy himself in moderate living.  
How can the world, however, improve ? Self-loving in all things,  
Each would forcibly bring all others into subjection.  
And thus deeper and ever more deep we sink into evil.<sup>2</sup>

The translation of *Reineke Fuchs* had an immediate and permanent success. Knebel, Wieland, Schiller, and Herder praised it enthusiastically—the last-named going so far as to describe it as “the first and greatest epic of the German nation ; indeed of all nations since Homer.” Among the general public it found equal favour, and to the present day it has remained the most widely read of Goethe's works, many regarding it as an original production. By Goethe himself, too, it was always regarded with special satisfaction, and there is none of his writings which he was more frequently in the habit of quoting.

Goethe had not yet done with the French Revolution, and at a later date it was to be the background of two other productions more important than any of those that have just been noted. But on the whole series of his works more or less directly

<sup>1</sup> This creed he summed up still more briefly when he said that the best wisdom for the citizen is “to sweep his own door.”

<sup>2</sup> Translation by Alexander Rogers, Bell and Sons, London, 1888.

connected with the same theme, he has himself expressed a final judgment. "When I look back into these many years," he wrote in 1822, "I see clearly how my pre-occupation with that tremendous subject for so long a period involved the almost complete waste of my poetical powers."



## CHAPTER XXV

### GOETHE AND SCHILLER

THE years from 1794 to 1805 are the most memorable as they are the most interesting in Goethe's life. Since his return from Italy in 1788 he had lived in unsympathetic isolation, out of harmony with his surroundings in Weimar, and out of harmony with the pervading tendencies of contemporary literature. As at other periods of his life, it was the stimulus and sympathy he received from another mind that roused him to new effort and to the play of new activities. What strikes us throughout Goethe's whole career is that he had not the serene, unshaken confidence in his own genius which enabled Milton and Wordsworth to pursue their respective ideals, regardless of an indifferent or a hostile world.<sup>1</sup> In Goethe, as those who came to know him best agree in noting,<sup>2</sup> there was a side of his nature which is visible neither in Milton nor in Wordsworth. It was the *Weiblichkeit*, the feminine strain in him, which rendered him morbidly sensitive to all forms of pain, and made intelligent sympathy indispensable to the full and continuous display of all his gifts. In his early youth his sister Cornelia had rendered him this sympathy; at a later time Merck had in some measure supplied it; and Frau von Stein had been a source of inspiration which, however dubious in its quality, had at least kept his nature alive. Since

<sup>1</sup> Körner writes to Schiller that Goethe "is very dependent on the opinion of others if passion does not overmaster him for the moment."—December 1, 1797.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Körner to Schiller, August 29, 1796.



his breach with Frau von Stein no one had taken her place, with the result that poetic inspiration seemed to be failing him and physical science to be gaining precedence in his intellectual interests.

There was something dæmonic, he considered, in the fate that brought him into spiritual contact with the man under whose influence he was to experience a "new spring" in productive activity. Till a fortunate train of circumstances revealed them to each other, it seemed as if Schiller and he were predestined to follow diverse paths in permanent antagonism. Schiller, we have seen, was convinced that this must be their eventual relation to each other. He had expressed to his friend Körner his doubt if Goethe and himself could ever come to a mutual understanding, and in a moment of irritation he went so far as to say that Goethe stood in his way. But it was Goethe's attitude to Schiller that seemed to preclude the possibility of their cordial approach. In Schiller he saw the most eminent representative of certain literary tendencies which he had come to regard as equally disastrous to art and to sound views of life. Schiller's youthful production, the *Robbers*, and some others that followed it, he regarded with a detestation which could not be mitigated by the reflection that his own *Götz von Berlichingen* was the parent of the monstrous progeny. On the other hand, Schiller had shown a sincere desire for a sympathetic bond with Goethe; he fully recognized the range and power of Goethe's genius, and, ever passionately bent on developing his own natural gifts, he realized that no one was so fitted as Goethe to aid him in the endeavour.<sup>1</sup>

Accident and Schiller's worldly tact brought the two men face to face at length and revealed to them what they could be to each other. For six years, in Weimar and Jena, they had lived in the same

<sup>1</sup> Before his friendship with Goethe began, Schiller wrote to Körner that among all the men he knew Goethe was the one who could do him the greatest service.

neighbourhood, and during all that period Goethe had deliberately repelled every attempt of common acquaintances to bring them into closer contact. Goethe himself assigns his reason for a line of conduct followed of set purpose ; by their respective attitudes to art and nature, he says, Schiller and he were further than the poles apart. It was out of no ill feeling towards Schiller as a man that Goethe chose to remain on distant terms with him ; he procured his appointment as a Professor of History in the University of Jena,<sup>1</sup> and he prepared his *Don Carlos* (a play of which he personally disapproved) for production in the Weimar theatre. Fortunately there were social relations that favoured a mutual approach. In February, 1789, Schiller had married Charlotte von Lengefeldt, a woman of natural gifts and keen literary tastes, whom Goethe had known from her childhood and who was intimate with the Weimar circle in which he moved. As she was an enthusiastic admirer of Goethe, she had striven with feminine tact to bring him and Schiller to an understanding, and subsequently, when the bond between them was struck, she did much to strengthen the tie. Another link was Körner, whose acquaintance, as we have seen, Goethe had made in Munich in the course of his visit to Silesia. Körner was Schiller's closest friend and it was to him that he had communicated his impressions of Goethe's character and genius. Schiller's high opinion of Körner's judgment in matters of literature Goethe fully shared, and during the entire period of their friendship Körner was the person in closest relations with both.

It was a happy accident, however, that gave the two poets the opportunity of seeing the depths of each other's minds. It is Goethe who relates the circumstances, and he does so with a minuteness of detail that shows the importance he attached to it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1788, Schiller had previously published his *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands*.

<sup>2</sup> In a paper entitled, *Erste Bekanntschaft mit Schiller*.

In May, 1794, on leaving the meeting of a Jena scientific society he fell in with Schiller who had also been present. On their way home they discussed the lecture to which they had listened. Schiller, though he generally approved of the discourse, animadverted on the piecemeal way in which it treated nature, a way which was not fitted to interest a lay inquirer. This was a criticism entirely in accord with Goethe's own outlook, and he replied that such a way of treating nature might be repellent even to men of science, and that there must be another way by which nature could be regarded as a living whole. Schiller was sceptical of this possibility, and Goethe, keenly interested in a subject which lay nearer his heart than any other, accompanied Schiller into his house to continue the discussion. Sketching the conformation of a typical plant, he expounded his own theory of the metamorphosis of plants. Schiller remained unconvinced, and objected that what Goethe had described was no *experience* but only an *idea*. With some heat Goethe replied that he was gratified to think that he had ideas without knowing it. They might have parted in mutual irritation, but Schiller, who, according to Goethe, had much more *savoir faire* than himself, answered "like an accomplished Kantian," and an animated argument followed which left neither convinced by the other. The talk had confirmed Goethe in his conviction that he and Schiller differed fundamentally in their attitude to nature, but, on the other hand, he had been impressed by Schiller's eager and intelligent interest in questions that were vital to himself, and for the first time he had felt the attraction of his personal charm. As the result of the interview, it was brought home to him that their paths might, after all, lie together. On June 8 (1794) he told a correspondent that Schiller was showing a more friendly spirit to Weimar, and expressed his satisfaction at the fact, as he looked for much good from his intercourse with him.



The same feelings, it would appear, were working in the mind of Schiller, for five days later he addressed a letter to Goethe which showed an increased confidence in their relations to each other. It conveyed a request, couched in the most flattering terms, that he would become a contributor to a periodical about to appear under the editorship of Schiller, assisted by certain eminent contemporaries. Goethe evidently had his hesitations, as eight days passed before he sent a reply cordially expressing his willingness to assist in the enterprise to the best of his ability. This was the first approach to helpful intercourse, and in the last week of August Goethe received another letter from Schiller which sealed the bond between them. It was a letter such as perhaps no man of genius ever received from another. Goethe's isolation and consequent depression since his return from Italy had been due to the fact that he had found no one who sympathetically understood him. But in Schiller's letter the history of his mental development and the essential characteristics of his genius were sketched with a breadth, delicacy, and insight which showed that one man at least had penetrated to the inmost processes of his mind. In a few pregnant words, Schiller signalized Goethe's "tranquil and pure" objectivity of outlook, his intuitive habit of mind, his eye for the organic whole in things, the necessity under which his nature and his surroundings laid him of seeking his ideals in Greek antiquity. "You sum up my existence," Goethe wrote in reply, and, at the same time, expressed his confident hope that henceforth they would be mutual helpers in the spirit. And, it may be added, Schiller's letter had revealed himself as well as portrayed the being of Goethe. It displayed the "open and rare earnestness," which Goethe says he had always noted in him, the delicate tact, which Goethe also recognized, and his characteristic eagerness for the best lights towards the perfecting of his endowment. All barriers between the two men were now removed, and

a fortnight in September which Schiller spent under Goethe's roof further convinced them that a beneficent fate had brought them together.

Portia says that in the case of a friendship like that between Bassanio and Antonio—

“There must be needs a like proportion  
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit.”

In the case of the friendship between Schiller and Goethe it is their dissimilarities, physical and mental, that make the first and most vivid impression. How they each struck an observer who saw them for the first time, is recorded in Henry Crabb Robinson's Diary. He was in Weimar in 1804, when Goethe was in his fifty-fifth and Schiller in his forty-fifth year. Of Goethe he writes as follows: “The sight of Goethe is enough to correct the childish misconceptions we form of a poet and a man of genius, as if they were wonders and shows merely to be stared at. In Goethe I beheld an elderly man of terrific dignity: penetrating and unsupportable eye: a somewhat aquiline nose and most expressive lips, which closed seemed to be making an effort to move as if they could with difficulty keep their hidden treasures from bursting forth.<sup>1</sup> A firm step ennobling an otherwise too corpulent body; a free and enkindled air, and an ease in his gestures, all which combined the gentleman with the Great Man.” His impression of Schiller, Robinson thus records: “Schiller had a wild expression and a sickly look; and his manners were those of one who is not at his ease. There was in him a mixture of the wildness of genius and the awkwardness of a student. His features were large and irregular.”

Their previous experience of life and their mental and moral characteristics were in no less striking contrast than their personal appearance and demeanour. Amid all his internal conflicts Goethe

<sup>1</sup> The tightly-closed lips are particularly noticeable in Schwerdgeburth's engraving of Goethe in his 83rd year.



had throughout his life enjoyed a measure of worldly prosperity such as has been the lot of few men of genius. Till his twenty-sixth year his career was that of a "conquering lord," as Herder described him, with every opportunity of self-development at his command; and subsequently he had been the trusted friend and counsellor of a prince who recognized his genius and made it his special care to foster it. On the other hand, from the time he reached manhood till the period when he joined fellowship with Goethe, Schiller had been ever at odds with fortune. Through untoward circumstances he had failed to secure even a modest subsistence, and he had been thwarted at every turn in the exercise of his natural gifts. And to the close of their comradeship, while Goethe was pursuing his self-imposed tasks undisturbed by external cares, Schiller had to produce his successive works in chronic ill-health and under the pressure of urgent household needs.<sup>1</sup>

Of Goethe's idiosyncrasies we have had abundant illustration—his abnormal sensitiveness to the character of the company in which he found himself, his cold reserve when it was uncongenial, his spontaneity of response when it was sympathetic. Schiller's characteristics, as contrasted with his own, Goethe has himself described. The dominant trait he noted in Schiller's nature was impulsiveness and an insistence in impressing his own convictions on others which it was difficult to withstand. Schiller, he says, "had something violent in his nature; he often acted too much according to a preconceived idea, without sufficient regard to the subject which he had to treat."<sup>2</sup> For Goethe whose nature it was to let a subject evolve itself, this, it is evident, was a trying trait in Schiller, and he plainly says that he had always a difficulty in resisting it and in

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Körner Schiller says: "How tenderly was his [Goethe's] genius led on by Fate, and now I have even still to struggle."

<sup>2</sup> Conversations with Eckermann, February 19, 1829. In my quotations from Eckermann, I have made use of Mr. Oxenford's excellent translation.

maintaining his independence of judgment when a question arose regarding his own work.<sup>1</sup> Thus contrasted in their temperaments, they were equally dissimilar in their personal habits. For Goethe, with his great physical energy, artificial stimulants were unnecessary in the labour of production; Schiller, on the other hand, with his languid vitality, could not dispense with them, and Goethe detected "pathological passages" in his writings which were the result of unnatural stimulus. As illustrative of their different physical natures, Goethe relates a curious experience. Visiting Schiller one day, he found him from home, and sat down to await his return. Soon he felt such an intolerable oppression from the atmosphere of the room that he was on the point of fainting. Schiller's wife, entering, explained the cause of his sensations. The fetid atmosphere was occasioned by a drawer filled with rotten apples, the scent of which Schiller found beneficial and necessary in his hours of work.

The bond that united them in a common endeavour, despite these antagonisms of taste and temperament, Goethe has precisely noted. "Different as our natures were," he says, "our tendencies were still towards one point, which made our connection so intimate that the one really could not live without the other."<sup>2</sup> But behind their common tendencies there was undoubtedly something deeper that created the essential bond between them. Schiller, on his part, has stated what for him was the real tie that bound him to Goethe. To a female correspondent,<sup>3</sup> who had animadverted on his friendship with Goethe, he wrote as follows: "It is not this lofty superiority of his intellect that binds me to him. If he had not been the man of the greatest worth whom I have come personally to know, I should have admired his genius only from a distance. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Conversations with Eckermann, March 23, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, October 7, 1827.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Gräfin Schimmellmann.

In his nature there is a high truthfulness and loyalty and the highest earnestness for the right and the good." In Schiller, apart from his genius, Goethe found the same high stamp of character as Schiller found in himself. Schiller, he said to Eckermann on one occasion, was as great at the tea-table as he would have been in a council of state, and he added, "he was a true man as every one ought to be."<sup>1</sup> In this recognition of each other's worth lay the abiding tie that held them to a common striving.

Their intellectual interests were certainly widely divergent, and would almost seem to have precluded a close intellectual bond. Schiller was profoundly interested in history, seeing in the conflict of man's will with the forces of nature the most impressive spectacle of the sublime. To Goethe, on the other hand, history was repellent equally on intellectual and on ethical grounds. The truth, he held, could never be satisfactorily known; and, so far as it could be known, history was "a confused tale of error and violence" only fitted to fill one with pain and repulsion. The interest and attraction which Schiller found in history, Goethe found in the study of nature, the consistent sequence of whose processes presented such a consoling contrast to the inconsequence of the actions of men. A deeper difference between them lay in their respective attitudes to abstract speculation. While for Schiller theorizing was a passion, for Goethe it was the most unsatisfactory of mental exercises, and he insistently disclaims any natural aptitude for it. As we have seen, he made a perfunctory study of Kant and he subsequently paid some attention to other philosophers, but he expressly says that this was entirely due to the surroundings in which he found himself. Thus it was that while Goethe's mind was a storehouse of facts gained by a lifetime's observation, Schiller was always conscious of the lack of a "vivid knowledge of things."

<sup>1</sup> Eckermann, September 11, 1828.



These divergencies in their intellectual interests involved a profound difference equally in the nature of their creative talent and in the methods of its working. Goethe himself has frequently emphasized what he considered the broad distinction between Schiller's type of genius and his own. Schiller was an idealist,<sup>1</sup> while he was a realist; or, as he otherwise put it, Schiller's genius worked subjectively, his own objectively. Alike in poetry and in science, it was Goethe's governing aim to see the object as it is, unaffected by personal feeling and apart from local and temporary conditions. For Schiller, on the other hand, the object in itself was secondary, the feeling it awakened, primary. To Schiller Goethe denied the close observation of nature, and he told Eckermann that the local colour in Schiller's *Tell* was communicated by himself. Nevertheless, he added, Schiller "had such a wonderful mind that, even on hearsay, he could make something that possessed reality."<sup>2</sup>

The broad general distinction which Goethe makes between himself and Schiller is borne out by the character of their respective work as a whole. But, as we know, no such definite line can be drawn between mind and mind, and Goethe was perfectly aware of the fact. He would have countersigned with full approval these words of a modern master in realism. "The realist, if he is an artist, will seek, not to show us a banal photograph of life, but to give us the vision of it more complete, more penetrating, more convincing than the reality itself."<sup>3</sup> Writing to Jacobi, about two years after his intimacy with Schiller began, Goethe tells him that he is no longer such an uncompromising realist as he had been, and that it is a great advantage for him to have supplemented

<sup>1</sup> "Schiller's peculiar productive talent lay in the ideal," Eckermann, January 18, 1827. Goethe says elsewhere that he was animated by the idea of nature, Schiller by the idea of liberty.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, January 17, 1827.

<sup>3</sup> Guy de Maupassant. Introduction to *Pierre et Jean*.

his one-sidedness.<sup>1</sup> And in the draft of a letter to Schiller, which, for reasons we can understand, was not sent, he makes what is for him a remarkable confession. "As an observer," he says, "I am an uncompromising realist, and would neither add to nor take away from the object before me. . . . On the other hand, where the working of my own mind is concerned, I may almost call myself a complete idealist; I do not inquire what the object is in itself, but demand that it should wholly fit in to my conception of it." In his last sentence Goethe certainly goes beyond his own convictions as well as his actual practice, but it sufficiently proves that he did not find in an absolute realism the perfection of art. And if Goethe was not an "uncompromising" realist, no more was Schiller an absolute idealist. "Two things," he wrote to Goethe, "are requisite in the poet and the artist: that he rise above mere realism, and that he remain within the sphere of the sensuous. Where these two things are combined, there is æsthetic art."<sup>2</sup>

It was precisely in the approximation of their respective ideals that the significance of their association for both mainly lay. "Schiller's idealism," Goethe wrote, "was in no way incompatible with my realism, and because both tendencies failed to attain their end, so long as they remained in isolation, both were ultimately drawn in a living sense to one another."<sup>3</sup> Thus they were united in their striving to the "common point," which Goethe says was the bond between them. Yet their respective work produced even during the years of their closest fellowship remained essentially disparate. In his final judgments on Schiller's genius and production, communicated to Eckermann, Goethe decisively marks their essential contrast to his own. Schiller's perpetual concern with theories of art seriously

<sup>1</sup> October 17, 1796.

<sup>2</sup> September 14, 1797.

<sup>3</sup> *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, 1805.



marred his poetry, since it led him to put the idea above the object, and thus frequently to transgress the truth of nature. In reading Schiller's plays Goethe found admirable scenes, but presently he came on something that violated nature and he could read no further. Schiller, he goes so far as to say, "saw his object, as it were, only from the outside; a quiet development from its interior was not his business." In Goethe's final estimate, therefore, Schiller remained to the end a subjective idealist, and thus, in spite of their striving after a common goal, belonged to an essentially different order of spirit from himself.

The permanent memorial of the intellectual fellowship of the two men is their correspondence, extending over a period of eleven years (June, 1794–April, 1805); it is to Goethe's conviction of its intrinsic value, at once for the German nation and for mankind, that we owe its publication. It was not till eighteen years after the death of Schiller (1823) that the idea of giving the letters to the world first occurred to him. By the close of 1824 they were ready for publication, and during 1828–9 they appeared in six volumes. It was in a wholly disinterested spirit that Goethe undertook and completed his task, for he frankly admitted—what indeed strikes the reader—the superiority of Schiller's letters to his own in spontaneity and self-revelation in "inner and independent value."<sup>1</sup> As the picture of two souls struggling in cheerful hope, not uncrossed by the vexations that the days will bring, after a common ideal; as "a true presentment of man's earthly life with its lights and shadows," he gave them to the world in the full confidence that it would appreciate the gift.

His confidence was not mistaken, for among the voluminous writings that both left behind them, their correspondence holds a unique place. Be it said that their correspondence does not belong to the category of "familiar letters," written with *abandon*,

<sup>1</sup> Goethe dictated his letters to Schiller.

with the easy effusion of the moment, touching on the trifles that casually interest the writer and to which his manner gives charm and a passing importance. When Goethe and Schiller write to each other, they are never in undress. They exchange the warmest expressions of affection and admiration, but throughout their whole correspondence we are living in the world of intellect. To Eckermann Goethe made the remark that to maintain his relations with Jacobi friendship was a necessity, as there was no intellectual bond between them; while, in the case of Schiller, their striving after a common ideal rendered friendship unnecessary. In this remark we have the explanation of the tone that pervades the letters of both. As has been said, the letters of Schiller are the more expansive; he is more insistent on the points he wishes to make; and it is he who for the most part raises the questions that come under discussion. But even Schiller's letters have not the ease, the freedom, the spontaneity of his correspondence with his older friend Körner, as Goethe's lack the emotional communicativeness of his communications to his later friend Zelter.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence, as a whole, is a record of the endeavour on the part of the writers to attain clear conceptions of what is essential to the production of the highest types of art, and more especially of the various forms of literature—the epic, the drama, the idyll, and the lyric. The endeavour was prompted by the fact that German literature possessed no great models, which as in other countries had established a living tradition. From first to last it is an æsthetic quest in which the correspondents are engaged, and they pursue it in a manner characteristic of each. “It seems to me necessary,” Schiller writes early in their correspondence, “that we should attempt to clarify our conceptions of the

<sup>1</sup> In their letters to each other Goethe and Schiller never got beyond the formal “Sie.” In his correspondence with Zelter Goethe uses the familiar “du.”

nature of the beautiful.”<sup>1</sup> In such an abstract discussion Schiller was in his element, but not so Goethe who, in sending his opinions on Schiller’s views, adds that he hardly recognizes himself when he takes to theorizing. More concrete is the substance of the letters in which, for their mutual benefit, they comment on each other’s works. In some seventy of his letters Schiller gives his estimate of *Wilhelm Meister*—generally characterizing it as a marvellous product of genius, but freely making suggestions, and indicating what he considered oversights or artistic lapses. Here, again, the different natures of the two men are emphasized. Replying to certain of Schiller’s criticisms on *Meister* Goethe frankly states that owing to the differences of their natures his demands could never be altogether fulfilled. So, when Goethe made some suggestions regarding *Wallenstein*, Schiller answers in terms that show the relative influence they exerted on each other. “The radical difference in kind between our natures admits of no other really profitable mode of communication than that of bringing the whole face to face with the whole; in matters of detail, it is true, I should not be able to lead *you* astray, because you are surer of your ground than I am, but you might easily upset me.”<sup>2</sup>

On one point they were in fundamental agreement—the superiority of Greek literature to every other. How Goethe had come to see in that literature the only models to be followed, if work of high and permanent value were to be achieved, has abundantly appeared. Schiller, also, by the time that their intimate association began, had arrived at the same conviction, and in his essays and letters on æsthetic subjects (1792–5) had maintained that only under the conditions of Greek life were the highest conceptions of art possible. They were at

<sup>1</sup> October 8, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe led Schiller to look without, and Schiller led Goethe to look within; this is how they specify their main influence on each other.



one, therefore, when in discussing the nature of the epic and the drama they based their conclusions on the examples of Homer and Sophocles—the two Greeks for whom they had the greatest admiration. It cannot be said that their lucubrations on these themes resulted in much profit either for themselves or for the world. Neither, in truth, had such a knowledge of Greek as to give solid value to his conclusions. Goethe read Sophocles with the aid of a translation, and it was through translations alone that Schiller knew Greek literature at all. It is, perhaps, a sufficient commentary on Schiller's conception of Greek tragedy that he regarded *Richard III.* as the greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies, and the one that reminded him most of the Greek.<sup>1</sup>

But the dominating impression left on our minds by the whole correspondence is the profound earnestness with which Goethe and Schiller both regard the æsthetic questions that come under their notice. No two divines could exchange opinions regarding matters concerning man's ultimate salvation with greater seriousness than Goethe and Schiller discussed the nature of beauty and the essentials of great art. But the truth is that for both men these æsthetic questions did concern the highest welfare of humanity. In the conception of both the most effective means of aiding man to develop his highest self is to extend the range and raise the quality of his pleasures. Art and morality, conceived in their real sense, they both held, are inseparably bound up together, and the one is necessary to the perfection of the other. "It is truly worthy of remark," wrote Schiller, "that laxity in æsthetic matters always shows itself bound up with moral laxity, and that the pure and strict endeavour after lofty beauty, together with the loftiest liberality towards all that is nature, will lead to strictness in matters of morality."<sup>2</sup> But the finest, as it is the most inward expression of the

<sup>1</sup> November 28, 1797.

<sup>2</sup> March 2, 1798.



spirit in which both men lived and worked, is to be found in the words with which Goethe concludes one of his letters to Schiller. "Abide fast in the bond of earnestness and love ; all besides is emptiness and sorrow." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> October 31, 1798.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### GOETHE'S EXTERNAL LIFE DURING HIS ASSOCIATION WITH SCHILLER

1794—1805

THE main interest of Goethe's life during the years 1794—1805 is in his renewed literary activity due to Schiller's stimulating sympathy. Throughout all these years it was his common endeavour with Schiller after their own self-development and after the realization of their artistic ideals that absorbed most of his thoughts and energies. But, besides literary production, his position in Weimar and his own manifold interests made calls on him at all times that involved a manner of life widely different from that of Schiller. "It often seems strange to me," Schiller wrote to him, "to think how you are so much thrown into the world, while I sit between my paper window-panes, with nothing but papers before me."<sup>1</sup>

The dominating fact of Goethe's life during these eleven years was that Jena, and not Weimar, was the place of his choice. Even before his close association with Schiller began, we have seen, Weimar had ceased to be congenial to him. From the friends there in whom he had once found sympathy he was now more or less in alienation. His estrangement from Frau von Stein was permanent. Wieland, who during the early Weimar years had worshipped his genius and stood by him in the face of malevolent criticism, was unable to understand the new ideals he had brought with him from Italy, and looked

<sup>1</sup> October 16, 1795.

coldly on the works that had been produced under their inspiration. With Herder his relations had always been difficult, and in 1788, shortly after Goethe's return from Italy, there had been an open breach. Formerly there had been a certain measure of intellectual sympathy between them, but Goethe's interest in Kant, whose philosophy Herder detested, precluded thenceforth all cordial interchange of opinion.<sup>1</sup> Between Goethe and the Duke, also, there was not the same complete understanding as in former years. The Duke had not approved of *Tasso*, and certain of Goethe's productions since his return from Italy had not been to his patron's taste. Moreover, now that Goethe was no longer an active public official, the Duke ceased to consult him on questions regarding which Goethe thought that he ought to have been consulted. Thus a certain coolness arose between them, though to the close of their relations neither ever lost that affection and esteem for the other which had been the foundation of their remarkable alliance.

Thus isolated in Weimar, Goethe found in Jena the sympathy that was a necessity of his nature. Jena had always attracted him, but at this period it possessed special attractions. Its University, as Goethe reminds us, "now stood on the summit of its glory." Among its teachers were the most distinguished representatives of their respective subjects to be found in Germany. On all the manifold matters that interested Goethe—science in its various departments, literature and history—he could hear from them the last word. Above all, Schiller was resident there till his removal to Weimar in 1799, and intercourse with him became more and more indispensable to Goethe. From the nature of his relations with Christiane, he regarded himself as free to go and come when he pleased. Year after

<sup>1</sup> There had been a misunderstanding between them regarding the payment of a sum of money which Herder alleged was due to him by the Duke.

year, therefore, he made prolonged visits to Jena—visits occasionally covering a great part of the year. Quartered in the old Schloss <sup>1</sup> which belonged to the Duke, he saw Schiller and other distinguished men daily, and even attended lectures on the subjects in which he was specially interested. In Jena, wrote Schiller's wife, Goethe is quite a different man from what he is in Weimar.

Besides these continual visits to Jena, Goethe, during the same period, made other journeys on business or pleasure, and of longer or shorter duration. Of these journeys, however, only two call for special note, as from both he returned with rich intellectual spoils. The first belongs to 1797, and extended from the end of July till past the middle of November; the second to 1801, lasting from the beginning of June till the close of August.

To the former, long meditated and undertaken with a definite object, Goethe attached a special importance; the experience it brought him, he says, made it "a beautiful point" in his life. We have seen how his visit to Venice in 1790 had disenchanted him with Italy. In view of what he owed to Italy, however, the disenchantment was bound to be only temporary, and he had conceived the plan of a great work of which Italy itself was to be the subject. This was a history of Italian art as it had been influenced by the climatic, social, and political conditions of the country. And the work was to have an ultimate object—to set before the German people an ideal which would inaugurate a new era in their national culture. For the carrying out of such a work Goethe knew that his own resources were inadequate, and it was to be achieved in collaboration with the man who, in his opinion, was the most competent to supplement his deficiencies. He was that Heinrich Meyer who had rendered him such valuable services in his artistic studies during his first Italian journey,

<sup>1</sup> He had eventually to change his quarters in Jena owing to an illness which he believed he had contracted in a damp chamber in the Schloss.



whom in 1791 he had taken in as a housemate and had appointed teacher of drawing in the Art School at Weimar. In 1794 the first step was taken towards the accomplishment of their common task. In that year Meyer was sent to study the art treasures of Dresden, where Goethe joined him for a time, and in the autumn of the same year Meyer proceeded to Italy where, at the Duke's expense, he was commissioned to obtain copies of such representative works of art as might be needful for the contemplated history. It had been Goethe's intention to join Meyer in Italy, but Napoleon's campaigns in that country and other obstacles had prevented him from carrying it into execution. In 1797 Meyer fell ill, and was forced to return to Switzerland, where at Stäfa, his native place, it was arranged that Goethe should visit him.

How seriously he regarded his contemplated journey is shown by the preparations he made for it. He burned all the letters he had received since 1772 to prevent their publication, and he made his will and secured from his mother the assurance that she would leave all she possessed to Christiane and his son. For all his intended observations by the way he made careful preparation, and he arranged that a secretary should accompany him. Frankfort was to be his first halting-place, and thither, on July 30, he set out, accompanied by Christiane and his son. For the first time, he says, he thoroughly enjoyed a journey from Thuringia to the Main, and never since he had left it did he have such a pleasant sojourn in Frankfort. As the paternal house had been sold, his mother now occupied another residence where she received her son. For reasons which we can understand, other quarters were found for Christiane, whom nevertheless Frau Goethe seems at once to have taken to her heart. "An unspoiled creature of God" she described her in her vivid way, and thenceforward she treated her with the overflowing kindness that came to her

instinctively.<sup>1</sup> As Christiane's presence may have been embarrassing, she and the boy were sent home after a few days, while Goethe himself remained till August 25. The way in which he spent his time during these weeks in Frankfort illustrates his procedure at all the chief halting-places in his journey. He sought the company of the most distinguished men in their respective departments, and diligently collected materials relative to the social and civic life of the community. From Frankfort he wrote to Schiller that in a blank book he had stitched together a collection of daily and weekly newspapers, extracts from sermons, ordinances, play-bills, and price lists, for his future use and as an interesting record of his travels. To the theatre of Frankfort—its management, its repertory, its actors—he gave special attention, as directing the æsthetic standard of its citizens and as suggesting hints to himself as Director of the theatre at Weimar. When in the last week of August Goethe left Frankfort, it was with a regret he had felt on the occasion of no previous visit. And his feeling would have been quickened had he known that he had seen his mother for the last time.

Leaving Frankfort on August 25, he proceeded by way of Heidelberg, Heilbronn, Ludwigsburg, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Schaffhausen, and Zürich, and on September 21 arrived at Stäfa, where Meyer was awaiting him. His meeting with Meyer he describes as "the chief gain" of his journey. During a week they spent together, Meyer displayed the art treasures he had brought from Italy, and their talk ran on the great work which they were to accomplish by their united labours. On the 28th, in company with Meyer, he continued his journey—his goal being the St. Gothard, which he now visited for the third time. His feelings there on each occasion are a commentary

<sup>1</sup> She continued to send affectionate letters and presents to her, but always, at the same time, took occasion to exhort her to attend to the comforts of the Geheimrath.

on the successive steps of his life. In 1775, when in his 26th year, it was with a mind racked by the conflicting emotions occasioned by his relations to Lili Schönemann that he had longingly regarded the path which led to Italy and which only the thought of Lili prevented him from pursuing. Four years later, when he stood on the St. Gothard, it was in the company of the Duke of Weimar, and it was then another woman who was the magnet that drew him home. On the occasion of his present visit he had no intention of continuing his journey to Italy, but Schiller, it appears, was apprehensive lest the temptation should prove too strong for him, and in a letter to Meyer earnestly besought him to avert what he considered would be a misfortune. Another visit to Italy, Schiller wrote, would only further distract Goethe's mind from fruitful production.

It was apparently while Goethe was on the St. Gothard that he received news which deeply moved him. Among the actors and actresses in whom he had taken a professional interest, Christiane Neumann had from her childhood specially attracted him by her dramatic talent and the beauty of her nature. His interest in her talent, he says, had often revived his flagging interest in the theatre, while her lovable character had inspired his deep affection. He had left her in Weimar ill with a mortal disease, and the news of her death now reached him. "A loving and honouring memorial," he wrote in the notes of his journey, "is all that we can give to the dead"; and immediately on the news of Christiane's death he began the elegy *Euphrosyne*,<sup>1</sup> which, devoted to the memory of Christiane, is one of the most touching things he ever wrote.

On October 8 the travellers were again in Stäfa, where they spent the next fortnight—Goethe occupied in learning all he could about the place and its neighbourhood. Now, also, he conceived

<sup>1</sup> It was as *Euphrosyne*, a character in an opera, that Goethe had last seen her on the stage in Weimar.



the plan of one of the many abortive works that strew his literary career. Having seen with his own eyes the country of Tell, it struck him that by poetic treatment the legend of Tell might be presented in its true significance, and that the epic form would be the best adapted to the subject. He long dallied with the project, which eventually came to nothing, and its only importance is that he suggested the theme to Schiller, whose *Wilhelm Tell* was the memorable result.

So pleasant and profitable had Goethe found his stay in Switzerland that he was tempted to prolong it till the following spring when, as circumstances should determine, he might proceed to Italy or France. The idea was abandoned, and, accompanied by Meyer, he began his journey homeward by way of Zurich, where he spent a few days. The mention of Zurich again reminds us of the various stages of development in Goethe's life, for Zurich was the home of Lavater. In his first Swiss journey his first act on his arrival at Zurich had been to seek out Lavater who, reporting to Wieland his impression of Goethe, had declared him to be "the most lovable, most affable, most charming of men." The principal object of his second journey to Switzerland had been the hope that Lavater's personality would have a beneficial influence on the Duke. The result had fulfilled his expectations, and he himself had not found language strong enough to express his admiration for the beauty of Lavater's character and life. But every year since, Lavater and Goethe had been drifting further apart. Fundamentally different by nature, each had followed his own lights and arrived at a point of view that made intercourse with the other impossible. So it was that Goethe now passed by Lavater's door, and no attempt was made by either to revive what had been.<sup>1</sup>

On October 26 Goethe and Meyer left Zurich,

<sup>1</sup> Lavater knew that Goethe was in Zurich as he had called on their common friend Barbara Schulthess, who had received him coldly.



travelled by way of Nuremberg, where they met Knebel and spent some days, and on November 19 were at home in Weimar. Goethe's visit to Switzerland was the last extensive journey that he undertook with a cultural object, and we have seen the importance he attached to it. The great work which he had contemplated, a history of Italian art, was never executed, but he was subsequently able to utilize part of the materials he had collected in the course of his journey.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it was one of his charges to his secretary, Eckermann, that after his death the diary of his travels, with letters written to friends throughout it, should be published as a record of interest and value to the world.<sup>2</sup>

The occasion of Goethe's other prolonged journey (1801) was one of those critical illnesses which, at more than one period, threatened to cut short his life. Such an illness had prostrated him on his return from Leipzig in August, 1768, when he long hung between life and death. Though naturally of a robust and powerful frame, his constitution was subject to minor maladies, frequently followed by a more or less serious crisis. On the 2nd of January, 1801, he complained of feeling ill, the result, he thought, of working too long in a damp chamber in the Schloss in Jena. His illness, which began with a catarrhal cold, developed into erysipelas in the face which closed his right eye, while a tumour on the back of the neck and head threatened his brain. For several days he was in a state of unconsciousness, and his life hung in the balance. None of his friends showed more anxiety than the Duke, who summoned from Jena a physician of repute, Dr. Starke, to whose skill Goethe mainly attributed his recovery. The critical day was the 9th, after which his illness took a favourable turn and there was a gradual convalescence. On the 22nd he was

<sup>1</sup> In the *Propyläen*, a journal of art, which he subsequently edited.

<sup>2</sup> It appears in the Weimar edition of Goethe's works as collated with the original MS.

so far recovered that he was able to have a musical party at his house when Schiller and other friends were present ; <sup>1</sup> and on the 24th his right eye opened. It was a gratification, to which he gave the warmest expression, that his friends and even comparative strangers had manifested for his recovery an affectionate concern which in some cases surprised him. Christiane's devoted care deeply moved him ; the Duke had shown that there was no diminution of affection on his side ; and the Herders, though there had long been a coldness between him and them, gave proof that old ties were not forgotten. Even in Frau von Stein Goethe's dangerous condition rekindled old feelings. "I did not know," she wrote to her son Fritz, "that our former friend was still so dear to me, that a serious illness from which he has been suffering for nine days would have affected me so much." From Goethe's mother who, like her son, shrank from all forms of pain, the news of his illness was withheld till the crisis had passed, when she wrote characteristic letters to him and Christiane, expressing her happiness that she had been kept in ignorance and her jubilation at his recovery.

By February 7 he was able in some measure to resume work (at the *Walpurgisnacht* in *Faust*), though still feeble and dispirited. Writing to Schiller on the 8th, he complains of his solitude and declares that he has lost all courage and hope. Towards the end of March he went with Christiane to his estate in Oberrossla, which he had purchased in 1798, partly for the good of his health, and partly to arrange for a new tenant, the former tenant having made himself liable to action at law. He remained at Oberrossla till the close of May, but, though his health was somewhat improved by his life in the open air, physicians and friends alike urged him to complete his recovery by a course of baths.

Pyrmont in Lippe-Detmold was the place chosen,

<sup>1</sup> His first desire on his recovery, he says, was to hear music.

and accompanied only by his son August, whose lively curiosity did much to enliven the journey, he started on June 5 for Göttingen, his first halting-place. On the night of his arrival he was the object of a demonstration which, in his despondent mood, was peculiarly gratifying. Against the express order of the University authorities, the students appeared before his hotel, the *Krone*, and gave him an enthusiastic ovation. The professors showed equally good feeling, and he specially notes his intercourse with Blumenbach, Professor of Natural History, who showed him the first aerolite he had ever seen, and with Heyne, the great classical scholar, whose collection of the heads of Homeric heroes, executed by Tischbein, convinced him of the truer conceptions of ancient art that had gained acceptance since the time when Lessing wrote his *Laocoon*. A sight of a different kind particularly interested him—the riding-ground at Göttingen under the charge of a famous trainer. The sight of a horse and rider, he solemnly reflects, is almost the only instance we have in nature, of “purposeful restraint in action, the exclusion of anything arbitrary, indeed even of the element of chance.”

During the week he spent in Göttingen he felt better in health and spirits than he had done for a long time, and it was in the hope of still further improvement that on June 12 he proceeded to Pyrmont. Perversely, as it happened, during the whole period of his stay there the weather was stormy and wet, and the baths did not prove so beneficial as he expected. The result was a recurrence of his nervous symptoms, so that even the company of the Duke, who joined him in the course of his stay, proved irksome. With such vigour as was left to him, he worked at his *Farbenlehre*, and, as usual, made a careful study of his surroundings and their history. It is an illustration at once of his susceptibility to immediate impressions and of his universal curiosity that he seriously thought of



writing a history of Pymont, whose development as a watering-place had specially interested him. On July 17 he left Pymont, little the better, he says, for his residence there, and returned to Göttingen, where he spent over a fortnight mainly occupied in consulting books in connection with the *Farbenlehre*, and learning all he could from the professors of anatomy, botany, geology, and astronomy. On August 15 he was at Cassel where he met Meyer and Christiane, with whom he spent a week of pleasure in attending the theatre and examining pictures. Leaving his companions, he went on alone (August 21) to the Court of Gotha, where Prince August, a literary dilettante, celebrated Goethe's birthday with a festal repast.<sup>1</sup> In "the best of humours" he arrived at Weimar on August 30.

What strikes us in connection with Goethe's various travels is that they were literally voyages of discovery. "Your son," Fräulein Klettenberg said to his mother, "sees more in a journey from Frankfurt to Strassburg than other men see in a journey round the world." Everywhere he went he was true to his resolve formed in Rome to take nothing on hearsay but to attain "living conceptions" of things. It would seem that the mere accumulation of details had itself an interest for him, but it was on the foundation formed of these details that he spent his life in the unceasing endeavour to enlarge his vision of man and of nature. And it is just this background of living experience that gives his conclusions a value and importance which speculative thinkers like Hegel have always recognized.

When not on journeys or engaged in literary production at Jena, Goethe had various and engrossing occupations in Weimar. On his return from Italy, as we have seen, he was relieved from all state duties, but undertook the management of the mines

<sup>1</sup> Baron Grimm, the friend of Diderot and other French men of letters, and now exiled by the Revolution, was then the guest of the Prince.



at Ilmenau,<sup>1</sup> the superintendence of the literary and artistic institutions of the duchy, including the University of Jena, and subsequently the directorship of the theatre.

Of all these charges, if we may judge from the space he devotes to it in his narrative of these years,<sup>2</sup> it was the theatre that absorbed most of his time and attention. On his own testimony it was only from a sense of its educational importance that he persevered in a task which brought him more worry than pleasure. With the beginning of the nineties, he says, his personal interest in the theatre was gone. In a moment of irritation, in 1795, he had even threatened to resign the directorship of the theatre, and had consented to retain it only on the Duke's promising to remove certain causes of friction that had arisen. He became more and more convinced, however, that the charge was unbecoming one in his position, and, in 1797, he proposed to the Duke that Iffland, the first actor of the day, should be appointed in his place—a proposal to which the Duke refused to accede.<sup>3</sup>

As it happened, in 1797 certain new influences revived Goethe's interest in the theatre, and stimulated him to renewed efforts for its improvement. A new actress trained by Iffland, Caroline Jagemann, was secured for the company and excited emulation among the other players. At this time, also, the popularity of the plays of Iffland and Kotzebue had quickened general interest in the stage. Moreover, Goethe's association with Schiller, whose genius was mainly directed to the drama, involved an active superintendence of the *personnel* and of the equipment of the boards. When, in 1798, Iffland visited Weimar and appeared on eight successive nights, his acting raised such enthusiasm that, with general approval, Goethe resolved to give effect to a desire he had long entertained. The new theatre which

<sup>1</sup> The mines had proved a failure.

<sup>2</sup> *Tag- und Jahreshefte.*

<sup>3</sup> Iffland was appointed Director of the Berlin theatre.

had been built in 1790 had been found wanting in attractiveness and inadequate in scale, and, under the superintendence of a skilled architect, it was now enlarged and beautified.

On October 12, 1798, the improved theatre was opened with a representation of *Wallensteins Lager*, and in the following years the other great plays of Schiller were successively produced—*Die Piccolomini* (1799); *Wallensteins Tod* and *Maria Stuart* (1800); *Die Braut von Messina* and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1803); and *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). Henry Crabb Robinson, who was present at the production of *Wallensteins Tod*, thus records his impression of the spectacle. "The theatre at this time was unique; its managers were Goethe and Schiller, who exhibited there the works which were to become standards and models of dramatic literature. Schiller had his seat near the Ducal box, Goethe an armchair in the centre of the first row in the pit. I found myself here in an elegant apartment, so lightly and classically adorned, and so free and easy in its aspect, that I almost forgot where I was. In the pit the seats are all numbered, each person has his own, and each seat has arms. The single row of boxes is supported by elegant pillars, under which the pit loungers stroll at leisure. The gentlemen go into the pit, when they do not, as courteous cavaliers, wait behind the chairs of their fair friends. The box in front is occupied by the Duke and Duchess with their suite, of course without the dull formality attending a Royal presence at Drury Lane. I beheld Schiller<sup>1</sup> a great part of the evening, leaning over the Ducal box, and chatting with the family."

The aim of Goethe and Schiller in their conduct of the Weimar theatre was that of all their artistic striving—to elevate the national taste by the presentment of the highest ideals. What these ideals in the drama were, we already know; in the tragedy of the Greeks they found the most perfect models for

<sup>1</sup> By this date (1803) Schiller was resident in Weimar.

imitation, and each in his own way sought to reproduce them, though, so far as popular acceptance is concerned, Schiller achieved the greater success. While Schiller's plays were for the most part received with enthusiasm, Goethe's *Iphigenie* and *Die natürliche Tochter* were failures. In their endeavour to impose the classical drama on the German public, the two poets were going counter to the general taste, which preferred the sensational plays of Kotzebue even to those of Schiller. But the opposition only hardened them in their attempt, and both were led into extremes which are a remarkable commentary on their past. Both had begun their dramatic careers with a supreme contempt for the French classical drama. Now, in the excess of their zeal and in the teeth of adverse criticism, they insisted on producing French plays with the same object of educating the public to the appreciation of what they considered a higher form of art.<sup>1</sup> And not only in the character of the plays produced, but in the attitudes of the actors Goethe insisted on a formal stateliness which gave them the appearance of automata. For example, they were not to show their profiles or their backs to the audience, and their gestures were regulated with pedantic precision.

What was the result of the many years' labour which Goethe thus spent in the endeavour to raise the public taste by theatrical representations? He has himself answered the question, though perhaps in a despondent moment. In a letter to his friend Zelter (December 30, 1825) he writes as follows: "Now that I no longer go to the theatre, and have no other concern with it, but have merely to watch my children and a new generation growing up, curious lights dawn upon me. . . . Only now do I appreciate the unsatisfactory character of the Danaïd-like work of these many years, during which

<sup>1</sup> Goethe translated for the Weimar stage Voltaire's *Tancred* and *Mahomet*—the latter at the request of the Duke, who was an admirer of French plays.



I endeavoured to bring to fruition the really great advantages pertaining to the stage and to give them concrete form." Doubtless Goethe here underestimates the result of his toil in connection with the Weimar theatre; we know that his name and example have materially contributed to determine the place which the stage has maintained in the national life of Germany. Nevertheless there is occasion to regret that the time and labour he spent in meeting the demands that the theatre made upon him were not given to tasks more congenial to his natural gifts and of more permanent value to the world.

Goethe himself did not regard his manifold external activities as detrimental to his work in literature. They were undertaken primarily in the interests of the public, but it was his lifelong conviction that only by continually widened experience can the work of the poet or artist maintain its freshness and richness of content. So it was that he was ever on the outlook for new fields of activity in which he could enrich his own experience. In 1798, as we have seen, he had, against the advice of his mother, bought an estate at Oberrossla, not so much with the intention of possessing a rural retreat, as of gaining a practical knowledge of agriculture. As long as the estate remained in his hands, he spent weeks at a time in acquainting himself with farming operations, though his mother's advice was justified, as troubles with successive tenants forced him to dispose of it in 1803. In building he had been interested at all periods of his life, and when, in 1791 a new palace in Weimar was begun, no detail of the architecture was undertaken without his direct superintendence till the completion of the work in 1803.<sup>1</sup> In 1799 he made a new experiment with the object of promoting the study of art and improving the public taste. Annual prizes were offered for works of art, the subjects to be suggested by scenes in the Homeric poems. The prizes were

<sup>1</sup> The work was delayed by the French wars.



awarded for seven successive years, and on each occasion, in his publication the *Propyläen*, he gave an estimate of the works of the successful competitors. He attached especial importance to the Friday Evening Society which, as we have seen, he had founded in 1791. During the period before us the Society was in its greatest vigour. Its members, among whom were professors from Jena, represented literature, science and art, and their meetings were devoted to the reading of papers and discussion of their contents. The work of the Society, Goethe assures us, had a highly beneficial influence on the University of Jena.

The University of Jena was one of the institutions for whose interests he was responsible, and he gave it his sedulous care. Poetry, as represented in Weimar, and science, as represented in Jena, made the chief glory of the Duke's dominions, and to maintain that glory was one of the enlightened reasons which influenced the Duke in attaching Goethe to his Court. In greater degree than the theatre the University evoked Goethe's interest, and he had the satisfaction of seeing flattering results from his fostering care of it. During the years 1790–1800, Jena had a larger attendance of students and a more distinguished band of professors than any other university in Germany. As in the case of the theatre, however, he had to encounter difficulties of administration which only patient persistence could overcome. The French Revolution had excited among the teaching staff a spirit of unrest and a desire for greater academic freedom, which was, in Goethe's conception, incompatible with a due respect for authority. One recalcitrant professor gave him special trouble. In 1794 Professor Reinhold, who had been the exponent of the Kantian philosophy, left Jena, and his place was filled by Fichte who proceeded to expound a philosophy of his own—the famous doctrine that the external world is merely the creation of the individual *ego*.

Fichte is one of the heroic figures in German history, and was of essentially noble nature, but, as Goethe remarks, he found it difficult to adjust himself to a world which was of his own creation. Before long he found himself in trouble in his new surroundings. On being deprived of certain lecture hours on week-days, he proposed to supplement them by lecturing on Sundays—a proposal which did not commend itself to the authorities. To the students also he gave such ground of offence that they rose in riot and broke his windows—"a most unpleasant way," comments Goethe, "of being convinced of a Non-Ego." In 1799 came a final breach with the authorities which resulted in his dismissal. Certain articles which appeared in a philosophical journal of which he was editor were interpreted as tending to atheism, a charge which Fichte indignantly repudiated. The Elector of Saxony, concerned for the faith of his subjects, wrote to the Duke of Weimar to say that, if Fichte were allowed to teach atheistical opinions, he would prohibit students from his dominions from attending the University of Jena. The Duke and his Council, of which Goethe was a member, resolved in the interests of the University to pass censure on Fichte, but before the resolution was made public, Fichte wrote a violent letter to C. G. Voigt, the Duke's chief minister, in which he threatened to resign if his freedom of teaching were curtailed. This was considered an act of insubordination which could not be passed over, and it was intimated to Fichte that his services were no longer required. Goethe consented to this high-handed action with sincere regret, as he had a real regard for Fichte's character and abilities, but, as mainly responsible for the welfare of the university, he felt that no other course was open to him. Yet there is something of irony in the fact that he, who at this period of his life gloried in the name of Pagan, should be the censor of opinions less destructive to the principles of

existing society than his own. It was the penalty he had to pay for all the advantages which the conditions of his life in Weimar had brought him.

But more serious trouble than the affair of Fichte awaited him in connection with Jena. During the closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth, there was a veritable exodus of professors from the university ; some induced by the offers of higher emoluments, others by the prospect of greater freedom of teaching. Among those who went were some who had been the chief ornaments of the University—Loder, the professor of anatomy, to whose instruction in that science Goethe had owed so much, Paulus, the professor of oriental languages, and Schelling, the most brilliant of the younger philosophers in Germany. More alarming for the future of the University than even the flight of professors was the action of one of them—C. G. Schütz, professor of history. Since 1785 Schütz had been a co-editor of the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, the most influential journal of its kind in Germany. In 1803, on his appointment to a Chair in the University of Halle, he laid a plan for transferring the journal to that town. In Goethe's opinion, this would have involved the ruin of the University of Jena, and, with an expenditure of energy that affected his health, he set himself to establish another journal in its place. His efforts were successful, and under the title of the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* the new journal appeared on January 1, 1804, with Goethe as its editor, supported by an excellent band of contributors.<sup>1</sup>

Goethe notes as one of the results of his friendship with Schiller that it brought him more freely into contact with his contemporaries. Till that friendship began he had lived in comparative isolation, even Herder and Wieland being no longer in sympathy with him. Through his joint endeavour

<sup>1</sup> Goethe continued to edit it for three years.



with Schiller, however, he came into fruitful intercourse with the leading spirits of the time—a time of brilliant promise in the intellectual history of Germany. In every department of mental effort—in literature, in science, in philosophy—there were initiators who were opening up new kingdoms to be conquered, and it was Goethe's good fortune to come into personal touch with the most significant of them. All were men much younger than himself, but, with that openness of mind to new ideas which characterized him to the last, he took in what they had to give him and assimilated what profited himself.

After Schiller it was to Wilhelm von Humboldt that Goethe acknowledged his greatest debt. Humboldt was a sympathizing and active collaborator in the joint endeavour of Goethe and Schiller to elevate the public taste in art and literature, and no one entered so fully into their spirit and had such a comprehension of their respective natural gifts. He was at one with them in their ideals of art and in their admiration of the Greeks, and to what he had to say on their own productions both attached a decisive importance. It was in matters of art and literature that Goethe found Wilhelm von Humboldt stimulating and helpful; to Wilhelm's brother, Alexander, he was indebted in other fields. In Alexander, with his universal intellectual interests, Goethe found a congenial spirit particularly in natural science, and to his fruitful intercourse with him in conversation and in subsequent correspondence he bore frequent testimony. Yet the bond between him and the Humboldts was essentially an intellectual one; some latent antipathies seem to have precluded a mutual approach of hearts such as we find in Goethe's relations with other correspondents.

There were others besides the Humboldts in whose ideas and aspirations Goethe found stimulus and refreshment, and among these he specially notes



Schelling who, in 1798, had succeeded Fichte as Professor of Philosophy in Jena. In that year, when he was only twenty-three, had appeared Schelling's book on the *Weltseele*, in which there was much that appealed to Goethe as presenting a view of nature that in some degree accorded with his own. Nature, in Schelling's view, is the embodiment of a process by which spirit rises to consciousness of itself, and so far Goethe was in agreement with him,<sup>1</sup> but when Schelling contended that the affinity of spirit with Nature rendered empirical inquiry into its laws unnecessary, Goethe, with his profound conviction of the value of experiment, parted company with him. Nevertheless, in letters both to Schelling and to others, he warmly testifies to the pleasure and profit he derived from the writings and conversation of the brilliant young philosopher.

To another youth, whose name like those of the Humboldts and of Schelling, became familiar to educated Europe, Goethe acknowledges a lasting obligation. This was A. W. Schlegel, who was settled in Jena as a professor of literature from 1796 to 1800. Before his coming to Jena, Schlegel had written acute and appreciative estimates of Goethe's writings, so that the way was paved for friendly intercourse between them. Schlegel's ideals in literature at this period were Goethe's own, and Goethe pays the highest tribute to his keen critical intelligence and remarkable attainments; Schlegel's presence in Jena, he says, was for me *gewinnreich*. But the bond between them was to be of short duration. Schlegel's personal character made cordial human relations impossible, and his subsequent literary career led to an estrangement between them which finally grew into lively antipathy. More lasting were Goethe's relations with another man of riper age whose acquaintance he also made at this time—F. A. Wolf, the renowned classical scholar.

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's poem, *Weltseele*, is inspired by Schelling's book.

Wolf's *Prolegomena* to Homer, attacking the single authorship of the Homeric poems, had appeared in 1795, and Goethe, as a lifelong student of Homer, was keenly interested in the controversy it provoked.<sup>1</sup> Wolf's remarkable personality made him somewhat difficult of access, but between him and Goethe there was a mutual regard and affection which ensured a steady friendship. To spend a day with Wolf, Goethe wrote, is to gain a whole year's solid instruction.<sup>2</sup>

It was mainly during his long residences in Jena that Goethe had the opportunity of enjoying the society of such men as those that have just been named. But in Weimar itself he was visited by persons more or less remarkable, whose impressions of him are contributions to our knowledge of his personality. Goethe, Schiller tells us, was not exactly a person to set people at their ease, and the conflicting reports of his various visitors illustrate the truth of the remark. We have seen what impression he made on the Englishman, Crabb Robinson,—that of the gentleman combined with the great man. It was another aspect of him that struck the poet Hölderlin, who, entering his presence with quaking, found his manner that of "a good, kindly father." Very different was his demeanour to another poet, with whom he had had some acquaintance in his early youth—the poet Bürger. When on presenting himself Bürger began: "You are Goethe; I am Bürger," the remainder of the interview was made so uncomfortable for him, that his wounded vanity stung him to the composition of a vindictive epigram and to an outpouring of malevolent gossip at Goethe's expense. Of special interest is the report of another visitor of Goethe, Jean Paul; as, taken with that of Heine of a later date, it has helped to create an image of Goethe which is certainly misleading in the light

<sup>1</sup> Goethe at first accepted Wolf's view, but subsequently became a convinced believer in the unity of the Homeric poems.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf calls Goethe "the noble, dear Goethe."

of other testimony. As Jean Paul describes his interview, Goethe entered the room in which he awaited him, "cold, monosyllabic, *ohne Accent*," though in the course of the conversation that followed, the "god" so far thawed that he read aloud a poem, in tones comparable only to deep thunder accompanied by the murmur of a gentle rain.

But the most illustrious visitor to Weimar during the Schiller years was Madame de Staël, who at the close of 1803 came in search of materials for her famous book <sup>1</sup> in which she was to reveal the mind of Germany to France. Both Schiller and Goethe were acquainted with her writings and had a high regard for her talent, and in herself, as the brilliant representative of a culture so different from their own, she was a unique apparition in Weimar. Unfortunately she appeared at a moment when Goethe was not in the best of moods to appreciate her. At the time of her arrival he was in Jena deep in his troubles connected with the removal of the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, in ill health and worse spirits. Herder had died on December 18, and on the 20th Goethe wrote to Schiller's wife that he envied him. At first he even refused the Duke's request to return to Weimar to meet the distinguished guest, but on second thoughts consented. From Schiller he had received an account of her "extraordinary volubility," and he resolved on a course of conduct towards her which he maintained during her stay of nearly two months. If we are to believe one witness, their first meeting was that of two torrents; each complained that the other absorbed the whole conversation. Both Schiller and Goethe feared that their remarks in answer to her indefatigable questionings would find their way into her prospective book, and each after his own fashion made it a point to elude them. Goethe's cue was good-humoured banter, in which he had always been an

<sup>1</sup> *De l'Allemagne* (1813).



adept,<sup>1</sup> and it is her own testimony that she could never bring him to talk seriously on any subject. It was with the sense of relief from an oppression that both Schiller and Goethe saw her depart at the close of the following February.

During all these years of Goethe's intimacy with Schiller the management of his household devolved on Christiane Vulpius. That his home life was not happy we gather both from himself and his friends. In a letter to Körner, Schiller speaks of his miserable domestic relations which he was too weak to change,<sup>2</sup> and Körner replies that this was doubtless the reason why he preferred to be so much away from Weimar.<sup>3</sup> Though the arrangement could not have been a comfortable one for himself, it showed his kindness of heart that Christiane's sister and aunt were lodged in the back part of the house where they were not seen by visitors. Such an arrangement, indeed, was necessary if Christiane was not to be debarred from all society, as the ladies of Weimar had from the beginning persistently held aloof from her. Occasionally, as we have seen, he took her with him on his journeys and even presented her to certain of his friends. Christiane, it should be said, was no longer the fresh, attractive creature who had excited his passion on his first meeting with her in the Park at Weimar. She had grown coarse in appearance, and a hereditary tendency to intemperance had begun to show itself in her. Her inordinate love of dancing gave Goethe special annoyance, as she chiefly indulged in the amusement with the students in Jena, of whom she became the jest. Yet there is

<sup>1</sup> It was with such banter that Goethe, in his early youth, had parried the pious appeals of Lavater and Fräulein von Klettenberg.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller appears to have had a special objection to Christiane. In his correspondence with Goethe, he only once makes a kind inquiry after her, and even then he does not refer to her by name.

<sup>3</sup> Goethe doubtless had his own relations to Christiane in mind when he wrote the following reflection, "Unreine Lebensverhältnisse soll man niemand wünschen; sie sind aber für den, der zufällig hineingerät Prüfsteine des Characters und des Entschiedensten, was der Mann vermag."



clear proof that there was never a serious breach in their relations. We have seen her devoted care of him during his dangerous illness in the beginning of 1801, and there is a touching letter from her to Meyer which shows genuine affection on her part, and, at the same time, presents Goethe in a frame of mind which the world does not generally associate with him. "I live in much anxiety for the Geheimrath," she wrote, "he is often quite hypochondriac . . . Don't mention this when you write, however, for one must not tell him that he is ill." On Goethe's side, too, there appears to have been no cooling of his affection. His letters to her on his frequent journeys continue to be as tenderly considerate as ever, and he constantly exhorts her to disregard malicious gossip as she can always be assured of his affection. In a single sentence which occurs in one of his letters, Goethe has precisely defined his general position in Weimar. "It is very strange that my position which, taken as a whole, could not well be more advantageous, should be so alien to my nature."

Amid his public and private cares Goethe had found solace of a kind that is not frequently the lot of mortals. It was a conviction borne in upon him in his early youth, that man finds his happiness only in the exercise of such creative talent as nature has vouchsafed to him. When this source of happiness was failing him, he had been fortunate enough to meet with one whose discerning sympathy had renewed it. Throughout all the years of his friendship with Schiller, despite frequent ill health and the thwarting of his most treasured aims, he had a consciousness of reawakened powers which, in his own words, produced in him a "second spring." Over all his years of friendship with Schiller, indeed, there had been a brooding shadow. Before their closer intercourse began, Schiller had been prostrated by an illness from which he had never wholly recovered and, every year that followed, his life was frequently in danger. Goethe's health, also, especially

during the last years of their intercourse, was so precarious as to be a source of disquiet to his friends. Doubtless, a sense of the uncertainty of the future had its own influence on the bond that united them.

In the beginning of 1805 Goethe, who all his life had his superstitions, expressed the foreboding that Schiller or he would die that year.<sup>1</sup> The state of his own health at the time was such that he seemed likely to be the first taken. During the later months of 1804 he had been ill and depressed, but in the following February his illness assumed so serious a form that on the 8th of that month his life was in danger. His recovery was slow, and not till May 1 was he able to visit Schiller, whom he found on the point of going to the theatre. They parted at Schiller's door, and they were not to meet again. The next day Schiller was ill, and on the 9th he died. Dreading the effect of the news on Goethe in his enfeebled state, no one had the courage to inform him. Meyer, who was with him when the news came, left the house without communicating it, and Christiane kept a similar silence. The next morning on Goethe's asking her if Schiller had not been very ill the preceding day, her sobs told him the truth. "He is dead," was his only remark, and covering his face with his hands, he turned aside and wept.

What the death of Schiller meant for Goethe, he expressed in pregnant words to his friend Zelter. "I thought to lose myself," he wrote, "and now I lose a friend and in him the half of my existence." Was it fortunate for their relations that Schiller died when he did? There are some indications that there were possibilities of estrangement between them in the near future. Goethe, as we have seen, was sometimes impatient at the insistency of Schiller's

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Voss relates that Goethe found to his dismay that in a letter addressed to Schiller on the morning of New Year's Day, 1805, he had written the words *der letzte Neujahrstag*. He tore up the letter, but with difficulty restrained himself from rewriting the same words.

suggestions regarding his work, and this impatience would almost certainly have increased. It was significant, too, that during the later years of their intercourse Goethe was showing a sympathy for certain youthful men of letters whom Schiller held in detestation. Moreover, as his past life had shown, it was a peculiarity of Goethe's temperament that new relations became sooner or later a necessity for him. From Merck, Lavater, Jacobi, and Frau von Stein, he had in turn become alienated, and, though Schiller was far more to him than any of these, it is not improbable that even Schiller would have ceased to be to him what he had been. On Schiller's part we have clear evidence that latterly his position in Weimar and his relations to Goethe were not all he could have wished. A letter of his to Wilhelm von Humboldt, written in the beginning of 1803, puts this beyond question. After complaining that Goethe during the preceding quarter of a year had been living in the seclusion of a monk and taking no interest in artistic and dramatic affairs in Weimar, he concludes: "Alone I can do nothing; often I feel myself impelled to look about the world for another residence and sphere of work; if I could find a tolerable one anywhere, I would go."<sup>1</sup> With some reason, therefore, it may be said that, so far as the friendship of the two men is concerned, the death of Schiller was opportune. If they had now become estranged, the world would have been robbed of one of the noblest spectacles in literary history—genius and friendship working in perfect harmony towards the highest ends. As it is, the names of Goethe and Schiller are inseparably linked and associated for all time with the loftiest strivings of humanity. The lines which Goethe wrote on the death of his friend will be for all time the seal and consecration of their union.

<sup>1</sup> A. von Humboldt mentions that, shortly before Schiller's death, there was *eine leichte Brouillerie* between him and Goethe.—*Gespräche*, II. 16.

So bleibt er uns, der vor so manchen Jahren—  
Schon zehne sind's !—von uns sich weggekehrt !  
Wir haben alle segenreich erfahren,  
Die Welt verdank' ihm, was er sie gelehrt ;  
Schon längst verbreitet sich's in ganze Schaaren,  
Das Eigenste, was ihm allein gehört.  
Er glänzt uns vor, wie ein Komet entschwindend,  
Unendlich Licht mit seinem Licht verbindend.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Epilog zu Schiller's Glocke*, written in the July succeeding Schiller's death. Three other stanzas were subsequently added—the last, that quoted, in 1815. It has been pointed out that in no poem of Goethe's is the influence of Schiller so manifest as in this *Epilog* devoted to his memory.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### POETICAL PRODUCTIONS DURING THE SCHILLER YEARS

1794—1805

GOETHE'S literary productiveness during the years of his association with Schiller fully justified his description of them as a "second spring." In range, in quality, and in quantity his output in pure literature surpassed that of every other period of equal length throughout his career. He completed and published *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and added new scenes to the First Part of *Faust*.<sup>1</sup> *Hermann und Dorothea* was wholly the work of this period as was also his drama *Die natürliche Tochter*. In shorter poems, too, it was notably prolific, their variety of theme and treatment evincing all the reawakened powers of the poet and his renewed zest in living. Besides his work in poetry, he wrote much in prose, mainly on the subject of art, and notably his account of Winckelmann, in which he gave to the world his matured and final conception of the ideal of Greek antiquity as contrasted with that of the moderns. Meanwhile his scientific studies were pursued with as much assiduity as ever, the *Farbenlehre* still holding the first place in his thoughts.

We have seen how, in May, 1794, Schiller invited Goethe to collaborate with him in a periodical he had undertaken to edit, and how, after some delay,

<sup>1</sup> *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust* will be most conveniently treated when we have the two Parts of both before us.

Goethe accepted the invitation cordially. The invitation, indeed, came appropriately. As the result of his art studies in conjunction with Meyer, Goethe's mind was overflowing with ideas which he was desirous of giving to the world, and Schiller's contemplated periodical offered him precisely the opportunity he needed. Moreover, the projected programme of the journal was such as to secure his whole-hearted approval. In words that might have come from Goethe himself, Schiller announced in his prospectus that its object would be to raise men's minds above merely temporary interests, to enunciate truths that are permanent and purely human, and thus "to reunite the divided political world under the banner of truth and beauty."

Issued by the enterprising publisher Cotta, and with Schiller as editor-in-chief, the first number appeared in January, 1795, under the title of *Die Horen*. The arrangement was that it should be issued monthly, each number to consist of nine sheets of medium size. No periodical of any age or country has counted among its contributors such a list of distinguished names. To mention only those who are known to all the world: there were Goethe, Schiller, the two Humboldts, Kant, and the elder Schlegel. It was Schiller's intention, indeed, to enlist the services of the leading spirits of the time, and by their combined effort to educate Germany in every sphere of her intellectual life. To successive numbers of the journal Goethe made various contributions in poetry and prose, the most notable being the *Roman Elegies* and his translation of the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini. The success of the first issue was encouraging, and the May number reached a circulation of 1800. But before the close of the first year of its existence there was a steady falling off in subscribers, and, as it eventually failed to pay its way, it ceased to appear after 1797. Both Goethe and Schiller were indignant at the failure of an enterprise undertaken with the highest of motives,

and both bitterly commented on the stupidity of the German public. Yet it is doubtful if from the nature of its contents the *Horen* could have found a wide circle of readers in any country and at any time. The miscellaneous character of the contributions appealed to no special class, and their manner of treatment was beyond the intelligence of the ordinary reader. For Goethe, the *Horen* remained an unpleasant memory. "What time," he said to Eckermann in his old age, "what time have I not wasted with Schiller on the *Horen*!"

The failure of the *Horen* only intensified feelings which Goethe had long entertained. Since his return from Italy he had been irritated and depressed by the illiberality and low standard of taste he found among his countrymen. His *Tasso* and his *Iphigenie* had been everywhere coldly received and, what annoyed him still more, his theory of colours had been contemptuously disregarded by the scientific men of the day. Now it occurred to him that a well-directed satire might have a wholesome effect by drawing attention to the national shortcomings. An occasion came in the spring of 1795. A Berlin journal made a coarse attack on the *Horen*, and in May he wrote a vigorous reply, entitled *Literarischer Sansculottismus*.<sup>1</sup> But something more effective was required, if the nation was to be roused to a sense of its intellectual deficiencies. As he had found a model for the *Roman Elegies* in the Roman elegiac poets, so he now found in Martial the suggestion of a form of satire admirably suited to his purpose. Martial entitled the thirteenth book of his Epigrams *Xenia*, gifts presented to guests during the days of the Saturnalia, and Goethe appropriated the title as an ironical description<sup>2</sup> of his own work, of which he had now formed a clear conception—a series of satirical distichs directed against persons and things that specially called for chastisement. His mind

<sup>1</sup> It appeared in the *Horen*, May, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Herder denounced his prostitution of the word.



once set on the venture, he communicated the plan of the work to Schiller who, chagrined at the diminishing circulation of the *Horen* and having the same cause at heart, warmly undertook to collaborate. During about seven months following December, 1795, they worked in common at their task, many of the epigrams being produced jointly, with the express intention of blinding the public as to their respective authors. In all, about a thousand epigrams were written, but only four hundred and fourteen were selected for publication. In September, 1796, they made their appearance in a publication of Schiller, the *Musen Almanach*,<sup>1</sup> which also contained several poems by Goethe.

If the object of the *Xenien* had been merely to create a sensation, their authors had reason to be gratified. The number of persons hit, and the unsparing nature of the attack drew the attention of the whole intellectual world of Germany. Representatives of literature, of science and of politics, all had their share of attention. Only a few of the distichs were laudatory, and these mainly concerned the famous dead, such as Shakespeare, Lessing, and Kant. The great majority had a sting more or less mischievous,<sup>2</sup> and were directed against either individuals or groups of individuals, identified with ideas or movements of which the authors disapproved. The most envenomed were pointed against friends of Goethe's youth—Lavater, the Count von Stolberg, and Jung Stilling. That on Lavater, probably from the hand of Goethe to whom he had become a bugbear, illustrates the licence which the two great men permitted themselves.

Schade, dass die Natur nur einen Menschen aus dir schuf,  
Denn zum würdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.

A few of the epigrams, it should be said, contained weighty reflections on art and life, expressing the

<sup>1</sup> The *Musen Almanach* appeared from 1796 to 1800.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe said that Schiller's epigrams were the most pungent



ideals which it was the common endeavour of Goethe and Schiller to impress on the German public.

As Goethe and Schiller stood almost alone in the literature of their time, the number of their adversaries was proportionately great; hence the widespread emotion which the *Xenien* evoked. The victims were infuriated; their friends and acquaintances shared their indignation; and the literary world in general was entertained by the scandal. Within a few weeks a second edition was necessary, and, after a few months, a third. Numerous replies from the enemy's camp followed, and Goethe, known as the chief offender, was attacked in his private relations with a virulence and indecency without a parallel in literature.

Goethe told Eckermann that the good effects produced by the *Xenien* on German literature were incalculable. This has not been the opinion of modern German literary critics. The *Xenien* set the literary world of the time aflame, but they had no visible influence either in raising the standard of literary effort or in liberalizing the minds of professional men of science—the two objects which they were mainly intended to accomplish. Goethe's work on the *Xenien* was, in truth, another illustration of that temporary aberration of aim,<sup>1</sup> which he so frequently laments in the case of his own life and which was, as he thought, exemplified in the lives of most other people. And they further show that the divine indifference to the world's opinion which has been ascribed to him was not a part of his character. Whatever the professed aim of the *Xenien*, they were primarily prompted by a personal irritation which was due to the feminine strain in his nature. In the case of Pope's *Dunciad* the whole man went to its production, and the result was a work of art of permanent interest. But the *Xenien* were only a splenetic outburst with no determinate artistic conception, and hence their interest was purely

<sup>1</sup> Goethe himself called the *Xenien* a "mad venture."

ephemeral and their appearance a regrettable incident in Goethe's life.<sup>1</sup>

After the "mad venture" of the *Xenien*, Goethe wrote to Schiller, that they must apply themselves solely to the production of great and worthy works of art and so put all their enemies to shame. To the close of their association both men fulfilled the ideal Goethe thus set before them; neither vouchsafed a reply to the numerous attacks on the *Xenien*. In the very year the *Xenien* appeared each was engaged on a work which is among the most notable that came from his hands; Schiller seriously began his *Wallenstein* and Goethe his *Hermann und Dorothea*. The theme which he chose for his poem, Goethe says, was such as seldom occurs twice to a poet. In 1794, in the course of his reading, he had come upon the incident which suggested it. He read how in the year 1732 the Archbishop of Salzburg had expelled from his diocese a multitude of Protestants who in the course of their journeyings passed through the town of Altmühl. In Altmühl there lived a burgher who had hitherto vainly endeavoured to persuade his son to marry. Among the refugees the son saw a maiden to whom he straightway lost his heart, and he announced to his father that he was prepared to make her his wife. The father gave his consent, but only on condition that the marriage was approved by their friends, including their preacher. The friends, regarding the appearance of the maiden as an intervention of Providence, gave their approval. The betrothal accordingly took place, and, to the surprise of everybody present, the maiden put a purse of 200 ducats in her lover's hands, when he presented her with the ring. Such is the tale that serves as the groundwork of Goethe's poem, though for the purpose of poetic effect he altered certain of its details. The

<sup>1</sup> In *Oberon and Titania's Marriage*, one of the scenes of the First Part of *Faust*, written in 1797, the year after the appearance of the *Xenien*, we have a satirical presentment of the condition of contemporary German literature.

cause of the flight of the refugees he assigns to the French Revolution, thus post-dating the incident by more than sixty years, and he ignores the purse of ducats, as it would have been a jarring note in his idyll.

Though the idea of the poem had thus been in his mind for some years, it was not till September, 1796, that he wholeheartedly began its composition. He has told us what was the immediate occasion of his inspiration. In 1795 there had appeared his friend Voss's *Luise*, an idyll of country life written in hexameters. Voss's poem is now held in little esteem in Germany, but in its day it achieved a great success, and Goethe seems to have admired it sincerely. What specially attracted him in *Luise*, however, was not its substance but its form, as proving that a successful poem could be written in German hexameters.<sup>1</sup> The other source of his inspiration, he tells us, was a book published in the same year as *Luise*—Wolf's *Prolegomena to Homer*, which, as we have seen, had keenly excited his interest. No poet is more generous in acknowledging his debt to others than Goethe, and it was only characteristic that he should tell Voss that he had shown him the way and that Wolf had given him the courage to proceed. In truth, he needed no external prompting to write *Hermann und Dorothea*. Its theme, as his handling of it shows, deeply interested him, and it was now his ambition to produce a work which would prove to the world that a modern subject wedded to a classical form would result in the highest form of art. Moreover, there was another motive impelling him, which is clearly apparent in the course of the poem regarded as a whole. He was still obsessed by the French Revolution, and he was more convinced than ever of the mischief it was working in Germany, and would continue to work. What he had hitherto written on that theme had failed to accomplish what he intended, but by presenting it under another

<sup>1</sup> Wahrlich, es füllt mit Wonne das Herz, dem Gesange zu horchen,  
Ahmt ein Sänger wie der Töne des Alterthums nach.



form he might succeed; and, in point of fact, his *Hermann und Dorothea* was admirably fitted to counteract the revolutionary spirit.

Goethe's original intention was to make only a short idyll out of the incidents recorded by his authority, and their meagreness seemed to necessitate such treatment. Out of what slender materials the poem was constructed, a bare relation of its essential incidents will show. There are six characters in all—the host of the Golden Lion and his wife, Hermann, the village pastor, the apothecary, and Dorothea. A crowd of refugees driven from their homes by the French Revolution is represented as passing in the neighbourhood of the village,<sup>1</sup> and Hermann's mother, pitying their miserable plight, sends him with a store of comforts for their relief. In the course of his errand he sees Dorothea, and his heart at once goes out to her. On his return he tells his mother that, if he is not permitted to marry Dorothea, he will never marry at all. His father had long tried in vain to persuade him to marry a girl with a dowry, and when the mother reported to him their son's resolution, he at first indignantly refused to listen. On the suggestion of the pastor and the apothecary, however, he agreed that they should see the maiden and report their impression of her. Their impression is favourable, and Hermann, left alone, brings Dorothea home, but leads her to believe that it is in the capacity of a general servant. On their appearance, the host, to her pain and embarrassment, greets her as his son's future wife; but, the misunderstanding having been cleared up, the pair are there and then betrothed.<sup>2</sup>

Such is the narrow basis on which Goethe constructed a poem consisting of nine cantos and 2034 lines. It was written in a different fashion from *Egmont* and *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, the production of

<sup>1</sup> Represented as on the right bank of the Rhine.

<sup>2</sup> The action of the poem takes place during a summer's afternoon and evening.



which extended over many years. At Jena, where alone he had full command of his genius, and in beautiful weather—for Goethe a necessary condition of poetic effort—he composed two-thirds of it during September and October, 1796. During the following winter months it was laid aside, but in spring another burst of inspiration enabled him to complete it about the middle of March. As Goethe was always distrustful of his hexameters,<sup>1</sup> he submitted the poem for revision to Schiller and W. von Humboldt, and it eventually appeared in October, 1797, in the *Taschenbuch* for 1788, published by Vieweg in Berlin. It was issued in two forms, one an *édition de luxe*, and, in accordance with his own demand, Goethe was paid down 1000 thalers in gold.

The success of *Hermann und Dorothea* was such as Goethe had not attained since the appearance of *Werther*. It was received with equal enthusiasm by the critics<sup>2</sup> and by the general reader. Schiller found it the “culmination of Goethe’s art and of all modern art,” and W. von Humboldt and A. W. Schlegel were of the same mind. That the poem became instantaneously and permanently popular in Germany, we can readily understand. The characters assigned to Hermann and Dorothea are such as to appeal directly to national feeling. They embody the German ideal of youth and maiden, and their manner of wooing is the ideal of lovemaking. And the other personages in the poem, all recognized types of the classes to which they belong, have precisely the traits which can be understood and appreciated by the general mind. There is here no subtle psychology as in *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, no abnormal character like *Werther* which appeals only to artificial natures. The Host, who puts his own comfort before every consideration, vulgarly ambitious, but good-natured at bottom; his wife, engrossed in her household duties, actively well-doing, and

<sup>1</sup> Voss was pedantically critical of Goethe’s hexameters.

<sup>2</sup> There were some discordant voices, however

managing her helpmate though he does not know it;<sup>1</sup> the apothecary, a garrulous gossip, fond of show, though he grudges the expense; and the pastor, above the others in range of intelligence, but sharing their interest without condescension, and giving his advice—all are so broadly human that they make a universal appeal. And the setting in which they live and move is at once attractive and reconciling. In a letter to Meyer Goethe describes the atmosphere he aimed at producing. "I have endeavoured," he wrote, "to separate, in the crucible of the epic,<sup>2</sup> the purely human element in the life of a little German town from its dross, and, at the same time, to reflect from a tiny mirror the great movements and changes of the world-stage." In seeking to present the "purely human" Goethe does not idealize the life of his little community, as, for example, Goldsmith idealized the past of his deserted village. He only presents the better side of its inhabitants—their neighbourliness, their kindly interest in each other's affairs, their satisfaction with the lives they severally lead. Their failings and weaknesses, the limitations of their existence are not concealed, but a pervading atmosphere of geniality assures us that in their daily round of duties, content and happiness are their portion.

In presenting such a picture of village life in Germany, Goethe was giving expression at once to his instincts as a poet and to his convictions as a man. As has already been said, *Hermann und Dorothea* is, in its way, a manifesto against revolutionary aspirations, though this intention is never intruded to the detriment of the poetry. The poem as a whole, indeed, may be regarded as an argument in support of Goethe's conviction that the state is best served by each citizen's confining himself to sweeping

<sup>1</sup> In the characters of the Host and Hostess there are many suggestions of Goethe's father and mother. Hermann's relations to his parents are also suggested by his own home experiences.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe sometimes calls his poem an "idyll" and at other times an "epic."

his own door. Directly and indirectly he seeks to drive the lesson home. The happiness and content attainable by a peaceful community is contrasted throughout with a world convulsed by discordant passions and striving after unattainable ends. An incident at the close is purposely introduced to give the poet the opportunity of directly conveying his moral. The pastor, in placing the ring of betrothal on Dorothea's finger, notices to his surprise that she wears another betrothal ring, and he jestingly asks an explanation. Dorothea explains that she had previously been betrothed to a youth who, swept away by the spirit of the time, had gone to Paris and perished by the guillotine. Then, in the concluding speech of the poem, Hermann (and it is significant that the words are put into his mouth) gives utterance to sentiments which, in Goethe's judgment, should animate every German youth.

Desto fester sei, bei der allgemeinen Erschütt' rung,  
 Dorothea, der Bund ! Wir wollen halten und dauern,  
 Fest uns halten und fest der schönen Güter Besitztum.  
 Denn der Mensch, der zur schwankenden Zeit auch schwankend  
 gesinnt ist,  
 Der vermehret das Übel und breitet es weiter und weiter ;  
 Aber wer fest auf dem Sinne beharrt, der bildet die Welt sich.  
 Nicht dem Deutschen geziemt es, die fürchterliche Bewegung  
 Fortzuleiten und auch zu wanken hierin und dorthin.  
 " Dies ist unser ! " so lass uns sagen und so es behaupten !

In his old age Goethe said that *Hermann und Dorothea* was almost the only one of his longer poems that still satisfied him, and he added the significant remark that he enjoyed it most in the Latin version.<sup>1</sup> The remark raises an interesting æsthetic question. Are the form and substance of the poem so harmoniously wedded as to give the impression of a pure and direct inspiration such as we receive from Goethe's best lyrics and the First Part of *Faust* ? Certain critics among his own countrymen have answered the question decidedly in the

<sup>1</sup> Versions were made both in Greek and Latin.



negative. They point out that there is an inherent incongruity between the substance on the one hand, and the Homeric form of verse and phraseology on the other. Through such a medium, they say, German idiom cannot be really conveyed. Consequently the different characters are frequently forced by the exigencies of the verse-form to express themselves in a fashion almost ludicrously incongruous. In such lines as these uttered by Dorothea we are no longer in the village on the Rhine but in the world of the *Odyssey*.

Und als ich wieder am Brunnen ihn fand, da freut' ich mich seines  
Anblicks so sehr, als wär' mir der Himmlischen einer erschienen.

What, again, are we to think of such words as these addressed to Hermann by his mother?

Sohn, mehr wünschst du nicht, die Braut in die Kammer zu  
führen,  
Dass dir werde die Nacht zur schönen Hälfte des Lebens,  
Als der Vater es wünscht und die Mutter.

"I shall never become attached to a foreign idiom so as to put it into my writings," says Keats, and speaking of the verse of *Paradise Lost*,<sup>1</sup> he remarks that "it cannot be written but in an artful, or rather, artist's humour." The "artist's humour" is everywhere evident in *Hermann und Dorothea*, and we are conscious throughout that the poet is engaged in a wager with himself. What he has to achieve is to adapt a highly artificial form of verse to a subject-matter that demands perfect simplicity of treatment. The almost inevitable result is that his attempted simplicity is apt to become *simplesse* and, at times, even *niaiserie*. Lines such as the following have the double fault of suggesting the mock-heroic and of transporting the reader to another world than that which the poem is meant to depict.

<sup>1</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, however, as Keats allowed, form and substance were in perfect harmony.



Hermann eilte zum Stalle sogleich, wo die mutigen Hengste  
 Ruhig standen, und rasch den reinen Hafer verzehrten  
 Und das trockene Heu, auf der besten Wiese gehauen.  
 Eilig legt' er ihnen darauf das blanke Gebiss an,  
 Zog die Riemen sogleich durch die schön versilberten Schnallen  
 Und befestigte dann die langen, breiteren Zügel,  
 Führt die Pferde heraus in den Hof, wo der willige Knecht schon  
 Vorgeschoben die Kutsche, sie leicht an der Deichsel bewegend.

Disjoined from their context, indeed, many passages in the poem suggest, like the foregoing, a parody of the Homeric manner. In the long speeches put into the mouths of the different characters we have the same sense of incongruity as in the description of homely details. Hermann, who is represented as a somewhat slow-witted youth, moralizes with all the gravity and profundity of a Nestor.

About the same period as Goethe was writing his *Hermann und Dorothea*, Wordsworth was engaged in his task of revealing to the world the poetry of humble life. A comparison between his work and that of Goethe, therefore, naturally suggests itself. We are at once conscious of the difference between poems like *Michael*, *The Brothers*, the tale of Margaret in the *Excursion*, on the one hand, and *Hermann und Dorothea* on the other. In the work of the English poet, form and substance are in perfect unison; we have the single impression of his direct contact with his themes which keeps him within the truth of nature. For Goethe, from the character of his medium, this directness and simplicity was not possible; in his work the "artist's humour" necessarily obtrudes itself, with the result that the inner harmony which should characterize a perfectly sincere poem, is lost. In a moment of frankness Goethe told Madame de Staël that all his poems in imitation of the antique were of the nature of "artistic experiments." Such an experiment is *Hermann und Dorothea*, and, regarded as such, we cannot but marvel at the ingenuity that went to the making of it. And it must always appeal to a more numerous body of readers than such poems of Wordsworth as have

just been named. The greater variety of characters and interests, its very artificiality, give it a piquancy which the grave sincerity of such a poem as *Michael* does not possess for the ordinary person. *Hermann und Dorothea* is not to be classed with the greatest efforts of Goethe's genius, but it is one of the permanently interesting poems in literature, and is another signal proof of the range of his gifts. As a mere *tour de force*, it is probably unmatched in the literature of any other country.

During the same period of his association with Schiller Goethe produced another poetic whole which, though cast in a different form from *Hermann und Dorothea*, proceeded from a similar inspiration. *Die natürliche Tochter*, like *Hermann und Dorothea*, has the French Revolution as its background and is likewise an experiment in the reproduction of Greek models. The dominating preoccupations of Goethe during his Schiller period were the French Revolution and Greek art, and *Die natürliche Tochter* embodies his attempt to combine them in an artistic whole. So far, therefore, that work, like *Götz von Berlichingen*, *Werther* and *Clavigo*, is a transcript of his own mental and moral experience, though so deeply divided from these earlier productions alike by its form and by its content.

We are to infer that Goethe had previously been contemplating a drama along the lines of *Die natürliche Tochter*, but, just as with *Götz* and *Clavigo*, it was an accident that led him to concentrate himself on its execution. In November, 1799, Schiller sent him a book, entitled *Mémoires historiques de Stephanie-Louise de Bourbon-Conti, écrits par elle même*, which had appeared in the previous year and which Goethe read with eager interest. As the Princess tells her story, it is as follows. She was the natural daughter of Prince Louis François Bourbon-Conti and the Duchess of Mazarin, but Louis XV. gave her a pledge that she would be publicly recognized as legitimate. As her mother

and her legitimate brother considered that a public recognition of her legitimacy would be injurious to their interest, they bribed her governess to abduct her from Paris and place her in a cloister. Given the option of remaining there or of marrying a commoner, she, after some hesitation, chose the latter alternative. Eventually she deserted her husband, and, after many adventures, played a prominent part in the Revolution.

The reading of the Memoir immediately suggested to Goethe the "conception" of his tragedy, and the plan of it at once took shape in his mind. "In the plan," he says, "I prepared for myself a vessel in which I hoped to deposit, with becoming seriousness, all that during so many years I had thought and written regarding the French Revolution." The execution of his plan was not carried out under such bursts of inspiration as was the case with *Hermann und Dorothea*. Conceived in November, 1799, it was not completed till the beginning of 1803—a troubled period of Goethe's life, as in these years he lost an infant child (the fourth), nearly lost his son August, and in the opening of 1801 was himself prostrated by a dangerous illness. Between October 21, 1801, and the end of December he wrote the First Act, continued his work on the succeeding Acts during 1802, until on April 2 the completed drama was played in the Weimar theatre. Printed in October of the same year, it appeared in a *Taschenbuch* for 1804, published by the house of Cotta in Tübingen. In connection with his work on *Die natürliche Tochter*, Goethe specially notes that it was executed in complete secrecy, not even Schiller being informed of it, and that he charged the actors engaged in its rehearsal not to communicate its contents.

A brief outline of the plot will show to what extent the French Revolution forms part of the action of the drama. The leading characters, of whom only one has a personal name, are the King,



the Duke (the King's uncle), Eugenie (the Duke's natural daughter), Eugenie's Governess, and the Secretary. The play opens with a scene in a dense forest, in which the Duke informs the King that he has a scapegrace son who has been little of a joy to him, but that he has also a natural daughter whose character and accomplishments would make her the pride and delight of any father. As they are conversing, they are alarmed by the outcries of an excited crowd, and they learn that in the course of a hunt Eugenie has been precipitated over a cliff and thrown from her horse. Carried into their presence, she recovers consciousness, and in the conversation that ensues the King promises to have her recognized at Court on the occasion of his next birthday, though, at the same time, warning both father and daughter of the grave difficulties that may lie in the way. These difficulties, we are given to understand, are due to political complications which may threaten a revolution. In point of fact, in the scenes that follow, it is not made clear that Eugenie's fate is determined by any changes in the State. The Secretary, an agent of her brother who dreads her public recognition as detrimental to his own interests, persuades her governess to carry her off secretly as her life is in danger. On her disappearance the Duke is informed that she has met with another riding accident, this time fatal, and that she is so disfigured that he would best consult his feelings by refraining from the sight of her. In the Fourth Act the scene changes to a seaport town, where we find Eugenie and her governess—the latter in possession of a document in which it is set down that Eugenie must either marry a commoner or leave the country for ever. A judge in the town, represented as of noble character, offers her marriage, and, after a desperate struggle with herself, she agrees to accept him, but on the condition that he regards her only as a sister. By the last words in which she gives the reason for her decision, we are



again reminded of the perturbed world in which the action of the drama takes place. She sees a people on the eve of revolution and entertains the hope that, in the commotion that will follow, she will obtain justice and deliverance.

From this sketch of the development of the play it will be seen that the Revolution forms no essential part of its texture. We are given to infer that the brother's proceedings against his sister were influenced by political events, but what these events were is nowhere put distinctly before us. There is no scene in which the threatened uprising of the populace is represented by the speech and action of any of its leaders. The references to a revolutionary movement by the persons of the drama serve only to remind us that such a movement was in progress, and they do not spring from the necessity of the action. There is some ground, therefore, for the contemptuous remark of Goethe's future defamer, Ludwig Börne, that "instead of seeing a world-history in the court-history, Goethe sees a court-history in the world-history."

The truth is, however, that, though *Die natürliche Tochter*, as originally planned, was to consist of only one drama, Goethe came to find that a wider canvas was needed for the working out of his conception, and that it was his intention to develop the one play into a trilogy. The intention was never fulfilled, and he alleges as the reason that he made the mistake, fatal for him, of giving the first part to the world. We have sketches of scenes that were to have a place in the continued work, but they are of such a fragmentary nature that we can form no conception of it as a completed whole. We naturally ask: Had Goethe written his projected trilogy, was he likely to have given the world a work that would have imaged the Revolution with such comprehensiveness, depth, and power that it would have been universally accepted as adequate to its theme? In view of what he had hitherto produced on the same subject,

we may have our doubts. In his stormy youth, in the days when he wrote *Götz* and *Werther*, he might at least have written scenes that would have expressed the passions of the revolutionary time, but by the whole bent of his culture throughout his maturer years, by the very environment in which he had lived since the day he entered Weimar, it would seem that he was rendered incapable of adequately treating a theme repellent to his deepest instincts.

In *Die natürliche Tochter*, as we have it, Goethe had failed to achieve one of the objects he set before him ; he had not poured into his "vessel" all the thoughts and emotions which the Revolution had evoked in him. His other object had been to produce a drama, "lofty and powerful," on the model of a Greek tragedy. Did he at least succeed in this object ? The general opinion, both in Germany and elsewhere, has always been that, regarded as a whole, the play must be counted among Goethe's failures. As an acting piece, for which, indeed, Goethe did not intend it, it could not from its nature be a success ; in Weimar, where it was first produced, it was coldly received, and in Berlin it was damned.<sup>1</sup> It is essentially, therefore, as a reading play that it must be judged, and, as such, it has not found favour either with critics or with the general public. On its appearance it was, indeed, highly praised by persons to whose opinion Goethe attached the greatest weight. It gave pleasure to Carl August, who was an ardent admirer of the French classical drama ; Schiller and Herder spoke of it in enthusiastic terms ; and Fichte called it "the greatest masterpiece of the master." But the general voice of contemporary critics was depreciatory ; the judicious Körner predicted that it would never find wide acceptance, and one critic, L. F. Hüber, described it in a phrase, "marble-cold and marble-smooth," which is stereotyped in German literature.

<sup>1</sup> Mainly, however, through the agency of the friends of Kotzebue, Goethe's enemy.

The supreme merit which Schiller found in *Die natürliche Tochter* was "its lofty symbolism," and for Goethe this was the highest praise. As he now conceived the aim of the dramatic poet, it was to make his characters general types, not individuals with personal idiosyncrasies. This conception he had already, in some degree, exemplified in *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, but we have it on his own word that *Die natürliche Tochter* was an express attempt to embody it. Yet it is not evident what any of its characters specifically symbolize. We can hardly think of Eugenie and her fortunes as adequately typifying a nation in revolt against intolerable oppression. With the other characters our difficulties are the same. The King is good-natured and well-intentioned and may suggest Louis XVI., but this does not make him a symbol; so with the Duke, the fond father; and with the Secretary, the knavish tool of Eugenie's unscrupulous brother. Of all the persons of the drama Eugenie alone leaves us with a definite image, and that not as a type, but as a being of real flesh and blood. As it is, however, even the character of Eugenie loses its effectiveness owing to the world in which she moves—a world of vague outlines, peopled by nameless and more or less shadowy beings.

But the most remarkable characteristic of the play is the style in which it is written. In his *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, under the date 1801, Goethe notes that he had been reproached by his friends for translating French plays for the Weimar theatre. The truth is that in the classical French drama he saw a nearer approach to that of the Greeks than in anything that had been produced in Germany, and he was convinced that an acquaintance with the best work of the French dramatists might help to cure the tendency to formlessness which he regarded as the vice of German literature. In point of fact, his own play has all the characteristics of Racine and Voltaire. In its regularity of form and in its dignified restraint it is precisely after their model, and in



its style it is an equally close reproduction of their manner. Passages such as the following may suffice to show to what extent Goethe had surrendered himself to "poetic diction" in its most artificial form. The Secretary thus addresses the governess—

Wenn ich des Glückes Füllhorn dir auf einmal,  
Nach langem Hoffen, vor die Füße schütte,  
Wenn sich die Morgenröte jenes Tags,  
Der unsern Bund auf ewig gründen soll,  
Am Horizonte feierlich erhebt ;  
So scheinst du nun verlegen, widerwillig  
Den Antrag eines Bräutigams zu fliehen.

This is a line put in the mouth of the Judge—

Wenn Phöbus nun ein feuerwallend Lager sich bereitet.

It is one of the ironies of Goethe's literary career that he who in his *Götz von Berlichingen*, the first of his works to draw to him the attention of the world, defiantly set at naught all the conventions of the French drama, should, as the result of his theorizing on art and literature, have given to the world a work which is an explicit recantation of his youthful challenge ; and it is a further irony that the work of his youth remains a more living product than the work of his maturity, composed after so many years' observation and reflection. Yet, while *Die natürliche Tochter* has been coldly regarded from its first appearance, a work so deeply meditated by a poet of the stature of Goethe, could not fail to possess some high distinctiveness that marks the hand of the master. A phrase in which Madame de Staël summed up her impression of it not inadequately characterizes its strength and weakness ; the feeling it produced in her, she said, was a *noble ennui*. The *ennui* is the result of its artificial style, the vagueness of the characters, and its torpid action, but along with this feeling we have at times the sensation as of listening to a solemn music, the burden of which is some mysterious destiny that is being fulfilled.

Another work of the same period, also a fragment,



is a remarkable illustration of Goethe's obsession by Greek models. One of the subjects discussed by Schiller and Goethe in their correspondence was the contrasted requirements of the epic and the drama, and the discussion suggested to Goethe the writing of an epic in which he should apply the principles at which they had arrived. We have seen how he had thought of Tell as a suitable theme for epic treatment, but had finally abandoned the idea. Another topic that had occurred to him was that which he subsequently embodied in the tale entitled *Die Jagd*. Finally, in December, 1797, he fixed on a subject from the Homeric world itself. Between the death of Hector, with which the *Iliad* closes, and the departure of the Greeks after the burning of Troy, he conceived that there was scope for a poem in the Homeric manner. So closely did he think of reproducing Homer that he meant to imitate him even where he thought he was faulty, in order, he says, that he might not miss his "feeling and tone"—an intention, Schiller objected, which must have had unhappy results. As frequently happened with Goethe, a considerable interval elapsed between conception and execution, and it was not till March—April, 1799, that he composed the first "book" extending to 561 lines, all of the poem that was ever written. The fragment opens with a description of the burning of the funeral pile of Hector, and of Achilles hastening the building of his own tomb in view of his expected early death. The scene then changes to Olympus where the Gods, with conflicting sympathies, debate the hero's approaching doom. Finally Athena, with the approval of Hera, descends from Olympus and in the guise of Antilochus, the son of Nestor, approaches Achilles and consoles him with the assurance that early death is the most certain guarantee of immortal fame. Here the fragment ends, but from the sketch of the further development of the poem which Goethe has left, we learn that Achilles was to receive consolation of

another kind ; he was to fall in love with the Trojan Polyxena, and "forget his doom in accordance with the madness of his nature." From the first the *Achilleis* has met with all but uniform condemnation, even in Germany, as an impossible attempt.<sup>1</sup> The great Wolf disapproved of it, and another contemporary scholar declared that it did not contain a single Homeric line. But Goethe himself, at a later date, used of the French Revolution words that sufficiently explain the lack of success of the poem. "For a nation," he said, "nothing is good unless it has been evolved from within and from its own general needs, without slavish imitation of another. . . . All attempts to introduce any outlandish novelty, the need for which is not rooted in the heart of the nation, are foolish, and all such contemplated revolutions fail; for they are without God, who Himself refrains from such bungling."

Conceived in a lighter mood was a series of dramatic sketches which Goethe, in his capacity of Court poet and director of the Weimar theatre, executed during the same period—*Die Befreiung des Prometheus* (1795); *Paläophron und Neoterpe* (1800); *Maskenzug zum 30 Januar* (1802); and *Was wir bringen* (1802). Of the first of these pieces only seventeen lines were written, and we may regret that Goethe did not work out his conception, since it would have been interesting to compare it with Shelley's treatment of the same theme in his *Prometheus Unbound*. *Paläophron und Neoterpe* is one of the happiest of the lighter things that Goethe produced. Written to be played at the opening of the new century, it is in the form of an allegory, which is meant to convey the general truth that the old and the new time have mutual lessons for each other, but also to have special reference to the new developments in German literature at the

<sup>1</sup> In his *History of German Literature* W. Scherer praises it, but he admits that "even after about four hundred lines we feel somewhat wearied." Translation by Mrs. F. C. Conybeare, II. 194.

close of the eighteenth century. Neoterpe represents the new time, and, attended by two froward children, she seeks refuge in a temple from the pursuit of Paläophron, the representative of what is old. Paläophron, accompanied by two repulsive-looking old men, finds Neoterpe in the temple, and there ensues a dialogue between them, the outcome of which is that they agree to dismiss their unpleasant attendants and to form a harmonious union. In equally happy humour is conceived *Was wir bringen*, composed for the opening of the new Lauchstädt theatre, and also in the form of an allegory. The conversation of the old peasant with his wife when she learns that he is about to pull down their cottage and erect a mansion in its place, is highly entertaining, though the latter part of the allegory is somewhat cumbrous and complicated. Aimed at the new school of literature, which was vehemently protesting against the restraint of classical conventions, are the lines which are among the best known Goethe has written—

So ist's mit aller Bildung auch beschaffen.  
 Vergebens werden ungebunde Geister  
 Nach der Vollendung reiner Höhe streben.  
 Wer Grosses will, muss sich zusammenraffen.  
 In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister,  
 Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben.

In one of his letters to Schiller, Goethe says that he owed to him his rebirth as a poet, and the number and quality of the shorter poems produced during his association with Schiller is speaking testimony to the fact. Not even during the prolific years preceding his settlement in Weimar did he give more convincing proof of the richness of his poetic vein when he was in the mood to work it. During his Schiller period he wrote over seventy short pieces, many of them among his most memorable things of the kind. Broadly these pieces are divisible into two classes. The first, and much smaller class, includes poems inspired by Greek models or Pagan



sentiment, while the second, in form and content, sprang directly from the world around him.

The reader of Goethe's poems will always turn with interest to the section which he entitled the Second Book of his *Elegies*.<sup>1</sup> The elegies it contains are six in number, and all are written, after the antique manner, in the form of distichs with alternating hexameters and pentameters. Of the six, four (*Euphrosyne*, *Das Wiedersehen*, *Amyntas*, and *Hermann und Dorothea* <sup>2</sup>) give direct expression to his own experience, and two (*Alexis und Dora* and *Der neue Pausias und seine Blumenmädchen* <sup>3</sup>) are pure idylls in which the poet transports us into the ancient world. Nowhere in his work inspired by the Greeks has Goethe more happily attained his end than in these two idylls. By long and assiduous practice he had gained a mastery over his verse-form which enabled him to play with it as with a native instrument. In this case theme, expression, and treatment are all in harmony and awaken no feeling of incongruity such as is produced by passages in the epic of *Hermann und Dorothea*.

Two poems that belong to this time, though not written in a classical measure, eminently reveal Goethe's pagan sympathies and his aversion to Christian asceticism. In the one, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, we are in the epoch and in the world when the Church was seeking to impose its creed on the barbarians, to whose natural instincts it was abhorrent. On the first of May the chief Druid summons the people to assist him in honouring the true God, the All-father, with the customary rite, the kindling of a great fire; but they are in terror of the Christian priests inspired by their "fabulous devil." The fire is kindled, however, and a Druid chants these words expressing the implication of the

<sup>1</sup> The First Book contains the *Roman Elegies*.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with the epic of this name, discussed above.

<sup>3</sup> There are evident recollections of Christiane Vulpius in *Der neue Pausias*.



poem — that Christian asceticism is contrary to nature—

So weit gebracht,  
Dass wir bei Nacht  
Allvater heimlich singen !  
Doch ist es Tag,  
Sobald man mag  
Ein reines Herz dir bringen.  
Du kannst zwar heut  
Und manche Zeit  
Dem Feinde viel erlauben.  
Die Flamme reinigt sich vom Rauch :  
So rein'ge unsern Glauben !  
Und raubt man uns den alten Brauch,  
Dein Licht, wer will es rauben ?

Meantime a band of Christian watchers see the flames ascending to heaven and monstrous forms of men and women weaving a satanic dance in their midst ; and the poem ends with the refrain of the Druid just quoted.

A more explicit and more remarkable expression of Goethe's pagan sympathies is contained in the second of the two poems, *Die Braut von Corinth*. An Athenian youth comes to Corinth to claim the bride to whom he has been pledged by the parents of both. But since their betrothal the girl's family, unknown to him, have become Christian. He arrives late at night, and is received by the mother who, after setting a repast before him, leaves him alone. Dejected at not seeing his bride, he throws himself on the bed, but has hardly closed his eyes when the door opens and there appears a figure clad in a white veil and robe, with a black and gold fillet about her brow, the dress of a nun. It is his destined bride, and in the conversation that ensues between them she relates her fate. In accordance with their new faith, which condemns all earthly pleasures, her parents have placed her in a cloister whence she has come to assure him of her love. They exchange gifts ; she presents him with a chain of gold ; and, rejecting his offer of a gold chalice, she requests a

lock of his hair. The hour of midnight strikes, when she is freed from a spell that bound her, drinks the wine her lover presents to her, but refuses to partake of the bread. Passion on his side follows, but it is only the semblance of passion which she can give in return. The mother, passing the door, hears the sounds within and enters, when her daughter upbraids her with the broken troth, but tells her that, despite the priests of the new faith, love will claim its own even from the grave. She ends by entreating that a funeral pile be kindled for herself and her lover that so together they may hasten to the old Gods. Nowhere has Goethe presented so harshly the contrast between Paganism and Christianity as in this weird poem. Its impressiveness and power cannot be denied, but the ghastliness of its subject is almost too great to permit the feeling of æsthetic pleasure. Our wonder, indeed, is that Goethe, who shrank from all that is painful and morbid, should have written it. He himself called it a "vampire" production, and the word suggests all that was alien to the temperament of Goethe, for whom sunlight and the healthy flow of blood were necessary goods.

It is from the poems of the Schiller period composed in native measures and prompted by direct personal experience that we receive the liveliest impression of the range of Goethe's poetic gift and of his manifold interests. They greatly outnumber those written in the antique manner, and suggest Goethe's returning interest in native forms and native themes which was to be decisively manifested before Schiller's death in 1805. Goethe had never theorized regarding the lyric as he had theorized regarding the epic and the drama, and the lyrics he now wrote have all the lightness of touch, the directness, terseness and simplicity which he had acquired before his going to Weimar. Love is their principal theme, and it is treated in every mood of the lover—seriously as in the *Schäfers Klagelied*, in *Trost in Thränen*, and

in *Nachtgesang* ; playfully as in *Die Spröde* and *Die Bekehrte*. Notable among his shorter poems is the series of ballads, most of them the product of 1797, the "ballad year." In these he displays all his early mastery of that form, though none have the glamour of *Erlkönig* and *Der Fischer*. In *Die Weltseele* and *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* we have work of another kind—the former expounding Schelling's conception of nature in which Goethe was so greatly interested, and the latter (addressed to Christiane Vulpius) an exposition of the theory of plant development at which he had arrived as the result of his own investigations. Other noteworthy poems belonging to the same time are such as *Der Gott und Die Bajadere*, in which we have a counterpart to *Die Braut von Corinth*, as its moral is that of the story of the Magdalene in the Gospels ; and the series of distichs, *Vier Jahreszeiten*,<sup>1</sup> embodying Goethe's maturest reflections on human life and experience, certain of which are among his sayings best known to the world. It may be said, in brief, that the shorter poems written by Goethe during the period of his intercourse with Schiller would by themselves convince us that they could only have been produced by one who was as great as a thinker as he was as a poet.

<sup>1</sup> As, for example, his well-known reflection on the effect of the French Revolution :—

Franzthum drängt in diesen verworrenen Tagen, wie ehemals  
Lutherthum es gethan, ruhige Bildung zurück.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### WRITINGS IN PROSE DURING THE SCHILLER YEARS

DURING the Schiller period Goethe produced, besides poetry, a considerable body of prose, mainly expounding the opinions on life and art by which he was now dominated—opinions, it may be said, which were subsequently to undergo important modifications. Two of the longest productions that belong to this time may surprise us as coming from the hand of one who, like Goethe, had the gift of original creation. The first was a translation of the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini; the other, a translation of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*. In undertaking such work, however, he had a definite object in view. At no time of his career did he regard himself solely as a poet. His overmastering impulse from the beginning had been to attain for himself a clear conception of his own place in the world and of the conditions under which his life could best be enjoyed and fulfilled. Such a conception, he was satisfied, he had now won for himself, and he directly and indirectly sought to give it to the world. And as a means of spreading the light, he attached high importance to the value of translations. "People may say what they like of the inadequacy of translation," he wrote in a letter to Carlyle, "it is and it remains one of the weightiest and worthiest of employments in the general life of the world."

We can readily understand how he was attracted to the figure of Benvenuto Cellini. No two men, indeed, could present a greater contrast than Goethe, as he had now become, and the swashbuckling hero



of Cellini's autobiography. But there was a double reason for Goethe's interest in Cellini; Benvenuto was an exquisite artist, devoted to art throughout all his strange career, and, as Goethe himself tells us, he is to be regarded as "a representative of his own century, and, perhaps, of collective humanity." Moreover, the age of which Cellini was so typical a figure, the age of the Renaissance, had a special interest for Goethe, as he saw in it a serious effort to recover those classical ideals which were for himself the true ideals to be striven after by progressive humanity. It was in 1795 that he first conceived the idea of translating Cellini's Autobiography, and he proposed to Schiller that his translation, as it proceeded, should appear in the successive monthly issues of *Die Horen*. During 1796 and 1797 fragments of the work were actually published in *Die Horen*—an ill-advised arrangement, as by their intermittent appearance they lost continuity of interest. When in 1803, however, the translation appeared as a whole, it was warmly received both by Goethe's friends and by his enemies, and it has since retained its place as one of the classical translations in German literature. Yet, as a translation, it is recognized as intrinsically faulty, based as it is on an imperfect manuscript, and rendered in a style that curiously fails to reproduce the characteristics of the original. But the importance of the translation for the student of Goethe is in the *Anhang*—the illustrative commentaries that are attached to it. In these commentaries on the art and the artists of Cellini's time, we have the translator's matured reflections on the observations he had made during his Italian journey and on his subsequent studies in conjunction with his friend Meyer. The most notable of his comments is that in which he describes Florence under the Medicis as an ideal environment for the free development of healthy human instincts. Characteristic of his abhorrence of Christian asceticism is his passing reference to Savonarola, whom he regarded as a

monstrous apparition in a paradise of art. "To this grand, beautiful, cheerful life a ridiculous, visionary creature, the monk Savonarola offers an ungrateful, stubborn, terrible opposition, and casts a sacerdotal gloom over the hereditary cheerfulness of the Medicis in the hour of death."<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, there was a special reason for Goethe's contemptuous judgment on Savonarola—a judgment, we may think, as intemperate as that of any sectary.

The other writer, Diderot, whom Goethe chose to translate, was as opposite in nature to himself as Cellini. In his own way Diderot was as remarkable an individuality as the complex Italian. His ebullient temperament and his audacious paradoxes<sup>2</sup> challenged Goethe to return upon his own convictions, and in none of Diderot's writings are these characteristics so remarkably displayed as in the work which he translated—*Le Neveu de Rameau*. It was by accident that Goethe was led to undertake the task. The manuscript of the work, which was not published during Diderot's lifetime, came into the hands of Catharine of Russia, and a transcription of it was made by Klinger, the friend of Goethe's youth, who forwarded it to Schiller's father-in-law. Goethe received the manuscript from Schiller to whom, in December, 1804, he announced his intention of translating it. By the close of the following January, Goethe sent the completed translation to Schiller, who, however, did not live to see its publication, as it did not appear till a few days after his death on May 9.<sup>3</sup>

As in the case of his translation of Cellini, it is Goethe's annotations to Diderot's work that here specially concern us. One of his ends in undertaking the task, he tells us, was to make known to Germany

<sup>1</sup> There is a reference to conversations which Savonarola had with Lorenzo dei Medici on his deathbed.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe called Diderot a "sophist of genius."

<sup>3</sup> Goethe also translated Diderot's *Essai sur la Peinture* with commentaries.

the literature and general culture of France, to which he himself always acknowledged his deep obligation. With this object he comments in detail on the persons and themes of the dialogue, and, in the course of his remarks, occasionally makes interesting revelations regarding himself. Speaking of D'Alembert, for example, he complains that captious people have found fault with his many-sided interests, maintaining that he should have been content with the fame he had won in his own field, "as if," comments Goethe, rebutting a reproach which was directed against himself, "as if unity of life with like-minded persons through serious sympathy with their various pursuits and achievements had not the highest value." But the most suggestive self-revelation on Goethe's part is contained in an excursus in which he surveys the development of taste in French literature.<sup>1</sup> The Greeks and many of the Romans, he says, show real taste in keeping the different kinds of composition apart from one another, but it would be a mistake to direct the northern peoples exclusively to these models. We have other ancestors to boast of, and many other examples to follow. Had not the prodigious been brought into contact with the absurd through the romantic turn of the dark ages, we should have had no *Hamlet*, no *Lear*, nor the best things of Calderon. It is our duty, therefore, he concludes, "to maintain ourselves with courage on the heights of these barbaric advantages, since we shall probably never attain to those that the ancients enjoyed." Written in 1805, the passage clearly indicates that Goethe was coming to believe that great literature could be produced on other lines than those of the classical models, and his own future example was to give convincing illustration of the fact.

Goethe's object in his translations of Cellini and

<sup>1</sup> In an interesting note on Voltaire Goethe denies him only two qualities which should be found in a great writer—depth and finish (*Tiefe* and *Vollendung*).



Diderot had been to promote the general culture of his countrymen by broadening their views on life and art, but he had a special message for them which had to be conveyed in more direct fashion. We have seen how, in conjunction with Meyer, he had contemplated a history of Italian art with the express intention of raising the æsthetic standard of Germany. He had abandoned this idea as beyond the resources at his disposal, but it was more and more brought home to him that in the interests of art, as in the interests of his nation's intellectual development, men's eyes should be opened to truer ideals of artistic production. "Such twaddle as is now current regarding principles," he wrote to Schiller in November, 1797, "was probably never before heard in the world." In the following year he took a practical step; in collaboration with Meyer, he started a journal under the title *Propyläen*,<sup>1</sup> which was to appear in parts and to be wholly devoted to the discussion of art.<sup>2</sup> The *Propyläen* was as unhappy a failure as *Die Horen*; of the 1300 copies printed by its publisher, Cotta, less than 450 were sold, and at the end of three years it expired. Schiller was even more indignant than Goethe at this their second failure to win currency for that gospel of art which both were profoundly convinced was for the saving of humanity. But we now know that they were, in truth, fighting a losing battle; a new generation had arisen, with ideals in literature and art which made a more direct appeal to national instincts and national tradition. Moreover, Goethe's manner of exposition was not fitted to attract the majority of readers. His style has neither the terseness and trenchancy of Lessing in his *Laocoon*, nor the rhetorical flow of Schiller in his æsthetic disquisitions. Goethe now wrote as he was henceforth to write—in a style that closely follows every intricacy of the subject,

<sup>1</sup> The celebrated portal to the temple of Athena and other buildings on the Acropolis at Athens.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, Voss, and Wilhelm Humboldt were also to be contributors.



but slow, involved and verbose.<sup>1</sup> What we may note in passing, as implied in the failure of *Die Horen* and the *Propyläen*, is that at the period before us Goethe's was not a name of power, even in the general literary world of Germany.

His leading æsthetic principles, as they are set forth in the *Propyläen*, may be briefly stated. It was, as we know, after long observation and reflection that he had reached them. When a student at Leipzig, he had imbibed from Oeser the doctrine that simplicity and repose formed the ideal of great art, and that only by the Greeks had that ideal been realized. In Strassburg the sight of the cathedral awoke in him an enthusiasm for Gothic architecture which was of short duration. On his way home from Strassburg his faith, he tells us, was shaken by the specimens of ancient art he saw at Mannheim, and his distaste for the Gothic gradually increased till at Venice, in the course of his first Italian journey, he declared himself definitively emancipated from its fantastic follies. Since he had returned from that journey, he had arrived at certain conclusions regarding the necessary conditions of beauty in architecture, painting, and sculpture, and it was these conclusions which he now expounded in the *Propyläen*.

Goethe's object in his contributions to the *Propyläen* was expressly practical; it was to direct the artist's attention to the best specimens of art in their respective kinds and to indicate how they may most profitably be studied. By this practical aim, Goethe's writings on æsthetics are sharply distinguished from those of Schiller, who moves only in a world of abstract theory. If Goethe makes use of the word *theory*, he is careful to tell us that he does not use it in the sense of the philosophers, at whom he scoffs by the way; theory for him implies only

<sup>1</sup> In an address to the Berlin Academy the physicist du Bois-Raymond said that Goethe had had far from a good influence on German style, and he compared him unfavourably with Voltaire and Lessing.

the general conclusions which are forced on the artist in the course of practising his art. The fundamental question for the artist is—how he should stand related to nature, the treasure-house from which he draws his subjects. Goethe's contention is that the artist must have a thorough knowledge of the nature of the object he seeks to reproduce. To paint a horse successfully he must know its inner structure as well as its external appearance; to paint a stone adequately he must realize in what respects it is differentiated from other species of stones. Only by such knowledge is the artist able to note what is "interesting, significant, and characteristic" in the subject he may choose for treatment. This last term *characteristic* has a large place in Goethe's æsthetic doctrine. We have the characteristic of any object, animate or inanimate, when we strip it of its individual peculiarities and thus form a conception (*Begriff*) of its essential nature. The characteristic is a necessary element of all artistic beauty, but of itself it does not constitute that beauty. Beauty, which is the crowning quality of a work of art, does not proceed from the object, but from the mind of the artist himself. A portrait, for example, can have little value, "unless the painter is in the highest sense its creator." From what has been said it will be seen what Goethe understands by the *ideal* in art. The ideal is not the unconditioned creation of the artist's mind, but the expression of the essential nature of the subject represented. Nature herself, owing to the conditions under which she works, is unable to produce the ideal type and it is the function of the artist to realize it. Such are the leading principles which Goethe set forth in the *Propylæen* for the guidance of artists. They were unheeded at the time and subsequently they had little influence.<sup>1</sup> To many of his countrymen,

<sup>1</sup> There is a close resemblance on many points between the æsthetic doctrine of Goethe and that of Sir Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses* (1769-90).

indeed, his attempt to lay down laws for the national development of art has seemed a *naïveté* explicable only by a temporary obsession.


One of the most remarkable pieces of prose in the whole range of Goethe's writings was produced at the close of his association with Schiller—his Essay entitled, *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*. In Winckelmann Goethe had been interested from his earliest youth. From his Autobiography we know with what enthusiasm he read Winckelmann's writings on art while he was a student in Leipzig, and with what dismay he heard of his assassination on the eve of an intended visit to Oeser, then Goethe's mentor in art. We have seen also, how, at a later date, Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* had guided and instructed him in his exploration of the antiquities of Rome. Winckelmann is, indeed, to be reckoned among the chief influences in his development, and it was with youthful fervour that he now undertook to make his significance known to the world. It was again an accident that was the occasion of the work. The letters of Winckelmann to a friend <sup>1</sup> came into his hands, and he resolved to edit them with three commentaries: one by himself, the others by Meyer and Wolf. Goethe's contribution, begun in December, 1804, was finished in the opening of the following year, and the completed work was sent to the press on April 19—less than a month before Schiller's death.

Goethe's essay is not a detailed biography but a characterization, tracing on broad lines Winckelmann's development from the uncongenial conditions of his youth till his settlement in Rome, where his genius found its free development. For Goethe, Winckelmann was not only a writer on ancient art possessed by Greek ideals, but also a man who in his life and character illustrated all the Pagan virtues. On his return from Italy, Goethe had frankly called

<sup>1</sup> Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis, who was settled in Weimar as an official attached to the Duchess Amalia.



himself a Pagan, and in his presentation of Winckelmann he is really depicting himself and his own conception of the highest human ideal. In what that ideal consisted, he has explained in a passage which is a vivid commentary on all his thinking and feeling during his Schiller period. The individual, he says, can accomplish even extraordinary things by his own well-directed powers, but he can only achieve the unique, the unexpected, when all his peculiar gifts work in harmony and in their totality. Owing to existing conditions, which compel the dispersion of his activities, the modern man is incapable of such concentration of his whole nature.<sup>1</sup> But among the ancient Greeks all the conditions which favoured totality of effort actually existed, and Goethe enumerates the national characteristics which made this result possible: confidence in themselves, absorption in the present, pure reverence of the Gods as their own ancestors, admiration of them as if they were only works of art, submission to an almighty fate, desire for posthumous fame in place of individual immortality. All these characteristics combined form such an inseparable whole, and so evidently result in a condition of mind in accordance with nature's aims that in the intensest moments of enjoyment, as in the deepest of self-sacrifice and even of extinction, we are conscious of indestructible sanity. In this interpretation of the mind and soul of the Greeks we may think that Goethe was influenced by the needs and affinities of his own nature. At a later day he came to testify that the Greek ideal, as he conceived it, was not so all-sufficient as at this period it seemed to him to be.



Goethe's work on Winckelmann was not only a confession of faith; it was also a manifesto. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, there appeared a group of youthful writers who in the course of a few years developed an æsthetic of their own in direct opposition to the classicism of Goethe and

<sup>1</sup> Schiller insists on this point in his æsthetic writings.



Schiller. Their opposition was based on various grounds. The ideals of Goethe and Schiller seemed to them to be anti-national and incompatible with modern conditions, to put Paganism in place of Christianity, and pedantically to restrict the limits of artistic creation. In 1798 the leaders of the group took a decided step; in that year they established a journal, the *Athenæum*,<sup>1</sup> as an organ in which they could proclaim their views to the world. Now they found a name for their creed; they called it Romanticism, and spoke of themselves as Romantics. It was against this creed that Goethe's essay on Winckelmann was specially directed, and it evoked a controversy in the literary world of Germany which lasted beyond the date of Goethe's death.

It is only with the general tendencies of Romanticism and Goethe's relations to them that we are here concerned. These tendencies, it may be said, touched the whole world of human interests. The Romantics took up an attitude of their own to nature, to art, to human conduct, to social responsibility and to religion. In all these interests Goethe was more or less in opposition to them, and the grounds of his opposition may be briefly indicated.

Goethe's attitude to nature was that it should be scientifically studied with the direct object of discovering its laws and man's relation to it. Only with the knowledge gained by such study is man able to understand his own being and the conditions under which his life has to be lived. When Goethe treated nature poetically, it was with the feeling inspired in him by the reign of law—an inspiration which, in his conviction, gives sanity to the mind and a joyous satisfaction to the heart. For the Romantics, generally speaking, nature existed only to supply food for the irresponsible play of fancy and imagination. The conception of the universe as a cosmos was alien to their modes of thought; what they

<sup>1</sup> It was published in Berlin, which is thus to be regarded as the cradle of Romanticism as it had been the focus of the *Aufklärung*.

chiefly sought in it was the mystical suggestion of emotion from the depths of sub-consciousness. Certain aspects and certain scenes in nature as specially stimulative of unearthly fancies mainly attracted them. Moonlight, the depths of forests, the dark places of the earth, were the environments which they sought by choice for the play of their phantasies. Their world was one outside both moral and physical law, where all things might happen which waking dreams might suggest. For Goethe nature was a source of helpful emotion, for the Romantics it spoke neither to the reason nor to the soul.

In his conception of poetry and its function in the life of man, Goethe differed no less from the Romantics. Poetry, in his view, should deal with worthy subjects and should be inspired by reason as well as by imagination. To achieve its highest effects it must be restrained by law ; there must be precision of detail and harmony of all the parts, and a latent logic even in its wildest flights. Though it should not betray direct moral ends, it is to be regarded as one of the most effective means of lifting men to a higher humanity. For the Romantics poetry was the unlimited play of the imagination—its end to produce a succession of moods in which soul and sense are laid to sleep. What has been said of the poets of the East, is applicable to the most typical Romantics : “ the poet is lost in his song, the man in allegory and abstraction ; they were as keen of bodily sense as of intellectual ; and delighting in a cloudy composition of both, in which they could float luxuriously between heaven and earth, and this world and the next, on the wings of a poetical expression, that might serve indifferently for either.” <sup>1</sup>

No less opposed were the respective attitudes of Goethe and of the Romantics to life. Even in the confusions of his youth Goethe never wholly lost sight of the goal which he felt it laid upon him by

<sup>1</sup> Edward Fitzgerald, Introduction to his *Omar Khayyam*.

nature to make the end of his striving; and when the years brought self-control, his undeviating effort had been to develop all the gifts that had been given him and to devote them to what he considered the highest human aims. As a State official, he had laboured with all his might for the welfare of the Duke's subjects, and when he became convinced that, not practical life, but art and literature and science were his true spheres of action, he sought to forward their interests with the same untiring assiduity. So it was with him to the end—unceasing endeavour, ever-widening views, constant renewal of the springs of life. As the Romantics viewed it, on the other hand, life was a continuous dream which took its colour from their respective temperaments. Experience was a succession of moods, having no binding unity and suggested by the moment's capricious fancy. Thus, as has been said of them, they disintegrated personality, and left no place in their scheme of life for such conceptions as duty or responsibility which hold human society together. Lawlessness, aimlessness, self-indulgence, vague sentiment were the general characteristics of the group. Goethe found the interest and the obligation of life in strenuous action, watchfully directed to a determinate purpose; while the Romantics passed their existence in vague yearning after ideals which had no relation to the demands that nature makes of man.

Opposed, as he now was, to the general tendencies of the Romantic School, Goethe was, in truth, in large degree, responsible for them. He and Herder together had set the example of revolt against existing conventions in art and literature, and even in the ordering of their lives. By taking Christiane Vulpius to his home, Goethe had shown in his own conduct how lightly he regarded the most binding of human institutions, and contempt of the marriage-tie was essentially bound up with the Romantic creed. For the most characteristic literary productions



of the Romantics, too, leadings could be found in various writings of Goethe in prose and verse. In *Götz von Berlichingen* he had shown his contempt for classical forms; the morbid emotions in which the school revelled were already present in *Werther*, their subtle psychology in *Tasso*; and even the famous irony on which they plumed themselves is implicit in the *Roman Elegies*, where Goethe plays with his themes as, according to their conception of irony, the poet must always be in a position to do if he is to achieve the finest effects. Moreover, individual works of Goethe consciously or unconsciously became models for their express imitation; his *Märchen* with its cryptic symbolism was the source of their fantastic tales—their most characteristic products; and *Wilhelm Meister*, with its detailed analysis of an individual's development, was the pattern which, after their own fashion, they followed in their more elaborate works of fiction. Thus it may be said that Goethe was in a manner the parent of the school, whose general tendencies he regarded as mischievous in both art and life.

But it was Goethe's characteristic to welcome every helpful suggestion from whatever source it came, and his relation to the Romantics, compared with that of Schiller, is an interesting illustration of the fact. To Schiller they were repugnant equally on account of their æsthetic doctrine and of their personal characters, and he eventually broke off intercourse with all of them. Goethe, on the other hand, from the first made it his endeavour to establish sympathetic relations with them—somewhat to Schiller's dissatisfaction. We have already seen him in touch with some of the men who were to be prime representatives of the movement. Fichte, one of the two philosophers from whom it drew its inspiration, was appointed professor at Jena with Goethe's approval, though for official reasons he was eventually dismissed from his post.<sup>1</sup> With Schelling, from

<sup>1</sup> Though we should hardly have expected it from his general attitude,



whom even more than from Fichte the Romantics derived their conceptions of nature and art, Goethe was on closer terms; he freely acknowledged the fresh impulses he had received from Schelling's philosophy and to the end he treasured any communication that came from him. We have seen, also, his friendly intercourse with A. W. Schlegel who was to be the representative critic of the school and its most conspicuous figure. Schlegel had begun as a classicist and an enthusiastic admirer of Goethe's genius; but before Schiller's death in 1805 he had gone in search of other ideals, and a breach gradually opened between them—a breach which became irreparable when through Goethe's intermediacy Schlegel became tutor to the sons of Mme. de Staël. The name of another youth, who was to be the coryphæus of the Romantics, has not yet been mentioned. He was Friedrich Schlegel, the younger brother of William, and like him primarily a critic. To Friedrich, who began his literary career as a champion of the antique, Goethe also made friendly approaches. Against Schiller's judgment, and even against his own, he put on the Weimar boards one of his plays, *Alarcos*, generally condemned as a worthless imitation of the Greek. But their friendly intercourse was of short duration. Brilliant, paradoxical, irresponsible, a kind of literary *gamin*, the younger Schlegel was incapable of inspiring respect or confidence. Schiller detested him with all his heart, and Goethe soon had reason to regard him with similar feelings. In the *Athenæum*, of which he was the founder, and in his notorious romance *Lucinde*, he expounded views on art and life which became the creed of the Romantics and which struck at the root of all that Goethe, in his existing phase, deemed of value to the world. He disparaged ancient ideals, put Goethe's earlier work above his later, and preached a religion compounded of sensualism and mediævalism that became

Goethe gave high praise to the famous "Discourses" of Fichte which roused the national spirit of Germany.

the profession of the school of which he is to be regarded as the real founder.<sup>1</sup> It was this new religion that chiefly excited Goethe's wrath, and under the contemptuous designation of Nazarenism he denounced it as a monstrous growth of human folly. With another youth, Ludwig Tieck, the most representative of the Romantic group, Goethe maintained a friendly, though uneasy, relation to the end. Tieck was more diplomatic than other members of the brotherhood, though, when he gave himself out as the poetical peer of Goethe, the patience of the great man was tried.<sup>2</sup> Novalis, the most interesting figure among the Romantics, who looked on life as a disease of the spirit, could not appeal to Goethe for whom life was a divine gift. Beginning as an adorer of Goethe,<sup>3</sup> particularly of *Wilhelm Meister*, Novalis ended by regarding him as the falsest of teachers in both life and art.<sup>4</sup> Of special interest in connection with Goethe's relations to the Romantics was his attachment to one of the most remarkable of German women—Caroline Schlegel or Schelling. With gifts equal to those of any adherent of the school, she was one of those "problematic" characters who always attracted him. To Schiller, who dubbed her "Dame Lucifer," she was altogether hateful,<sup>5</sup> but for Goethe she had a personal charm, which, with her singular insight and her free outlook on life, gave her a piquant interest. There was, indeed, a special reason for Goethe's being drawn to her. Caroline was the most keen-sighted and appreciative discernor of his genius, and it was she who

<sup>1</sup> He called Goethe's *Winckelmann* and his translation of *Le Neveu de Rameau* "sins against the Holy Ghost."

<sup>2</sup> Tieck declared *Manfred* to be a greater work than *Faust*.

<sup>3</sup> He called Goethe "the true stadtholder of the poetical spirit on earth."

<sup>4</sup> Goethe recognized the possibilities of the genius of Novalis, had it been sanely directed.

<sup>5</sup> The personal likes and dislikes of Goethe and Schiller are interesting as sidelights on their respective characters. The Duchess Amalia and Caroline were both distasteful to Schiller, whereas Goethe was attracted by them.

opened the eyes of the earlier Romantics to its distinctive characteristics and prompted the admiration with which they at first regarded him. A service which Goethe performed for her is at once illustrative of the time and of their community of feeling. In Jena she lived in uncongenial relations with the elder Schlegel with whom she had formed a temporary bond, but both discovered that there was no real tie of sympathy between them. In Schelling, however, she found what she missed in Schlegel, and Schelling, on his part, was responsive. All parties were aware of the situation, and through Goethe's intervention Caroline transferred herself to the side of the man to whom she was drawn by the "elective affinities."

Such were Goethe's general relations to the leading representatives of the Romantic movement. On his part, there was a sincere attempt to come to an understanding with them and to discover what was of permanent value in their ideas. But the publication of his *Winckelmann* revealed the impassable gulf that parted him and them. They scornfully rejected his principles of life and art, while their anarchic disregard of form and their pseudo-mediævalism filled him with a loathing to which he gave vehement expression in speech and writing. One of the many activities of the Romantics, however, had his warmest approval—their incursions into foreign literatures. For German culture the translations executed by different members of the School were of high and permanent value. A. W. Schlegel's rendering of Shakespeare's plays first made them really known in Germany, and his translations of Dante, Calderon, Cervantes, and Camoëns did a like service in connection with the literatures of other countries. Tieck translated *Don Quixote*, and, work highly appreciated by Goethe, Friedrich Schlegel opened up a new field by his studies in Sanscrit literature. For Goethe the significance of these labours was that they forwarded his ideal of a



world-commonwealth of intellect to which the genius of every people should make its own contribution and thus accelerate man's progress towards higher ideals.

In Goethe's long controversy with the Romantics it may be said that the victory, on the whole, lay with them. During the first half of the eighteenth century the tendencies of German literature were prevalently romantic. Posterity has confirmed the judgment of the Romantics that Goethe's work of home-sprung inspiration is of higher value than his work inspired by Greek models. It has to be said, also, that the greater productions which were yet to come from his hand were, in their spirit and treatment, more akin to romanticism than to classicism. Even his attitude to Gothic architecture which, as the result of his Italian journey, was now that of pure contempt, came to be comparatively sympathetic. And in the end he who had gloried in the name of Pagan and spoke of Christianity as a distortion of human nature, came to speak with reverence of its Founder and even to say that, if He were to return to earth He would find him His only true follower.



## CHAPTER XXIX

LIFE FROM 1805-1809

THE BATTLE OF JENA—GOETHE AND NAPOLEON

AFTER the death of Schiller Goethe had still twenty-seven years to live, and they were to be years as strenuous as the years that had preceded them. In mere quantity, indeed, the work he was yet to accomplish exceeded what he had produced in the past. In literature he executed works on a more ambitious scale than any he had yet given to the world: to name only the more important that came from his hand, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, *West-östlicher Divan*, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, and the Second Part of *Faust*. And these works, sufficient in themselves to represent a vigorous productivity, form but a moiety of his output. There have to be added his assiduous contributions to various departments of science, his criticisms on art and literature, and—itself a monument of labour—his vast correspondence which grew with his advancing years.

Yet, though there was no slackening of effort during this last span of Goethe's life, there were visible signs that he had passed his climacteric. It has been generally recognized that with the death of Schiller his life entered on a new phase. If his purely intellectual power remained undiminished, his imaginative force was no longer what it had been; in little of his creative work are henceforth found the freshness and power of the best work of the past. His previous history had been marked by epochs, each characterized by a fresh inspiration

and productive of new manifestations of his genius ; but he experienced no further inward revolutions such as would naturally divide these last years into distinctive periods. To the end, indeed, his mind remained open to new impressions, and his survey of the intellectual world was never more comprehensive than towards the close of his life ; but his opinions on art and life and literature underwent no change beyond the mellowing that naturally comes with advancing age. In the future that lay before him he was to find no such intellectual companionship and sympathy as he had found in Schiller, and his successive books have more or less the character of communings with himself. Since his return from Italy he had not found a congenial atmosphere in Weimar, and, as his own frequent testimony shows, the place did not grow more attractive to him : he was always glad, he says, to escape from its *böse Luft*. During all the years that followed the death of Schiller, there was but one man to whom he stood in relations of whole-hearted sympathy—the musician Zelter. Of all the men with whom Goethe came in contact throughout his long life, Zelter was the one who drew from him the most spontaneous expression of his heart and mind, but Zelter's home was in Berlin and it was only by correspondence and occasional meetings that they could keep up their acquaintance. When the philologist W. Grimm visited Goethe in 1809, he was struck by the air of solitude that seemed to surround him, and adds that this sense of solitude was apparent in his books. Yet, if there is a distinctive characteristic of the last phase of Goethe's life, it is his extended intercourse with the world. By correspondence and personal contact he came to be interested in the most distinguished workers in science and art and literature, and his repeated visits to the fashionable watering-place, Carlsbad, brought him the acquaintance of various exalted personages, a society in which he had been wont to move with complacency at all periods of his life.

Distinguished by no epochs in his mental history as his past had been, the twenty-seven years that still remained to Goethe have their most important landmarks in the successive books which he gave to the world. The genesis of these books and the conditions under which they were produced were, in his own estimation, the main concern for himself and the world, so far as any significance attached to his various activities. And it must be remembered that all Goethe's purely literary work is so closely interwoven with his own personal experience that in studying it we are following his mental and emotional history. During the years 1805-9 he continued his labours at his *Farbenlehre*, superintended a complete edition of his works, published the First Part of *Faust*, and wrote two pieces, *Pandora* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, both of which were influenced by a passing infatuation.

With Schiller's death Goethe had told Zelter that half of his own being had gone, and in the same letter he had added that he ought to begin a new life, which, however, at his age was impossible. Henceforward all that remained for him, he continued, was to do what lay before him without looking further afield. The first task that seemed to lie to his hand was to finish *Demetrius*, a drama which Schiller had left incomplete, so that "in spite of death" he might continue their converse in the spirit. But, broken in health by his long illness previous to Schiller's death, he was unequal to the task, and he had to content himself with superintending the performance of Schiller's *Glocke*, with musical accompaniments, in the theatre at Lauchstädt.<sup>1</sup>

The visits of friends and a succession of short journeys in the months that followed Schiller's death did much to restore his health and spirits. At the end of May came Wolf and one of his daughters, "who vied with the spring in all the freshness and attractiveness of her youth." We have already

<sup>1</sup> August 10, 1805.



seen what value Goethe attached to his intercourse with Wolf; to spend a day with him, he said, was to gain a whole year's solid instruction. During the fortnight that Wolf now spent with him, however, essential differences between their natures and their general outlook became unpleasantly apparent, and it was brought home to Goethe that Wolf could not be to him what Schiller had been. With Schiller differences in nature and in points of view had only led to closer union, whereas with Wolf such differences resulted in dissonance.<sup>1</sup> In their views of antiquity, in which both were so absorbingly interested, Wolf and Goethe were unable to reach a common understanding. It was Wolf's conviction that a true conception of the development of classical antiquity could only be attained by the study of its language and literature, while Goethe held that an equally satisfactory result could be obtained from a knowledge of its plastic art. Later in the season (June 23) came another visitor, Fritz Jacobi, with whom he seems to have enjoyed more genial intercourse than with Wolf. With Jacobi were associated some of the pleasantest memories of Goethe's youth, but since those days of intimate confidences they had followed such divergent paths that a certain estrangement had arisen between them. On the occasion of Goethe's visit to Jacobi in the course of the Rhine campaign he had felt that their intellectual bond was severed. On the present occasion, however, their intercourse was the meeting of heart with heart and not of mind with mind, and in both there was a return of the old cordiality—Jacobi testifying that Goethe was all his former self.

A return visit to Wolf at Halle, after Jacobi's departure, brought Goethe into contact with one of the celebrities of the age—Dr. Gall, the phrenologist. Gall was at this time engaged in his tour through Germany, Holland, Sweden, and Switzerland, with the object of proclaiming his theories to the world,

<sup>1</sup> Their estrangement increased in later years.



and he was now lecturing in Halle. Long devoted to the study of comparative anatomy, Goethe was keenly interested in Gall's lectures and attended them regularly.<sup>1</sup> He could not follow Gall in all his views, but he recognized in him a fellow-worker along the same lines as himself, and went so far as to say that Gall's phrenological conceptions were "the crown of comparative anatomy."<sup>2</sup>

But the event of the summer of 1805 that brought most satisfaction to Goethe was an unexpected visit from Zelter while he was at Lauchstädt preparing for the performance of *Die Glocke*. Zelter had already visited him more than once, and on each occasion his visits had been for Goethe an unalloyed pleasure. The attraction that Goethe felt to Zelter and the intimate intercourse to which it led are among the most interesting things in Goethe's biography. To original characters Goethe was always attracted, and Zelter was nothing if not original. Bred a stonemason, he had developed a talent for music, and by his gifts and native energy had risen to be Director of the Singing Academy in Berlin. He had acquired a fund of miscellaneous knowledge and had all the confidence of the self-taught in the value of his own opinions, which he freely aired in his talk and correspondence with Goethe. Everything about him suggested unconventionality. Small in stature, he went about in black silk breeches, silk stockings, and shoes with enormous silver buckles, and he had a bustling manner which broke through even Goethe's stately reserve, and was, indeed, for Goethe, one of his attractions. It was one of Goethe's sensitive points that he could not abide a person with spectacles, which, he maintained, raised an insuperable

<sup>1</sup> When Goethe happened to be ill, Gall delivered his lectures at his bedside.

<sup>2</sup> Gall deduced from Goethe's craniological formation that he was a born orator and that he could not open his mouth without uttering a trope. It is recorded that Goethe broke down in a speech he attempted to make at Ilmenau. His ordinary conversation abounded with figurative expressions.

barrier between mind and mind, but in Zelter's case, he told Eckermann, he was able to overlook them. Such was the man to whom for more than thirty years Goethe gave his affection and his confidence as he gave them to no other.

Through all these years he was attached to Zelter by a double bond. He had a deep admiration for his virility and sincerity—characteristics which Zelter eminently showed in a painfully chequered life. Of Zelter's musical talent, also, he had a high opinion—exaggerated, as it now seems, though it was shared by many of their most eminent contemporaries. Zelter's relation to Goethe was that of idolatrous regard alike for his character and for his genius. The correspondence of the two men, extending over thirty-two years, reveals the best side of Goethe's character. Music naturally furnishes a large proportion of the subjects it discusses, Zelter's setting of many of Goethe's poems being a theme of special interest to both correspondents; but it ranges over the whole domain of the arts, and in Goethe's letters we have some of his most valuable reflections not only on art but on life. What, however, is most interesting in the correspondence for the student of Goethe, is that in it we have the most spontaneous expression of his heart as well as of his intellect. He overflows in the expression of his affectionate regard for Zelter, and on the occasion of Zelter's frequent family misfortunes he has words which could only have been prompted by the sympathy of perfect friendship. For Zelter, Goethe's friendship was the absorbing interest of his life; it was his saying that he could not survive its loss; and the event confirmed it, as his death followed that of Goethe at an interval of two months.

The latter part of 1805 Goethe spent partly in Weimar and partly in Jena, apparently in restored health and spirits, as during this time he completed *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and resumed his lectures on scientific subjects to the ladies of Weimar, a task

in which he seems to have found a special pleasure. A new study in which he simultaneously engaged is worthy of note in view of the general bent of his interests. We have seen how at one period he gave his serious attention to the writings of Swedenborg ; now we find him devoting equally serious attention to Plotinus and requesting Wolf to send him the Greek text, as he found the translation he was using inadequate.

Goethe opens his record of the year 1806 with the remark that the world was then aflame in all its ends and corners. With that year, indeed, the European wars which had been the result of the French Revolution and of the ambition of Napoleon, entered on a new phase. Goethe had been brought into contact with actual war in the invasion of France by the Prussians and Austrians in 1792 and at the siege of Mainz in the following year, but hitherto the Duchy of Weimar had been left in peace. The reason for this immunity was Carl August's attachment to Prussia which, since 1796, had followed an ignominious policy of neutrality in the conflict between France and Austria. On December 2, 1805, however, Napoleon had overthrown the combined forces of Austria and Russia at Austerlitz—a victory, as it proved, which involved the end of the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia now saw her own interests threatened, and prepared for war with France. For Goethe this was an ominous outlook, since the Duke, as a commander of Prussian cavalry, would have to take his part in the impending struggle and his Duchy would lie open to the invasion of the enemy. And, in point of fact, from the opening of 1806 the Duke's contingent was quartered in Weimar to the disquiet of Goethe, who speaks indignantly of the arrogant and truculent bearing of the Prussian officers.

Actual declaration of war did not come till August, and during the first half of the year Goethe was able to lead his ordinary life in comparative peace.



He gave his usual attention to the theatre, his own *Egmont* and his youthful play *Stella* being among the pieces represented ; he continued his supervision of the edition of his past writings, and he had thoughts of resuming his suspended epic on Tell. Of special interest as reminding us of the new developments in German literature is his pleased attention to two poetical works which now came in his way. He received from Achim von Arnim,<sup>1</sup> a copy of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a collection of old German *Lieder* which was one of the most notable results of the Romantic movement, and he showed his appreciation of the gift in a sympathetic notice of the collection. The other work aroused his interest even more strongly. It was the *Nibelungenlied*, which the Romantics hailed as a primitive product of the national genius. Though Goethe did not find the same transcendent merit in it as did some of his more enthusiastic contemporaries, he recognized its claim to serious consideration as the expression of the time and of the people that produced it, and he gave it such close attention during successive years that the conclusions to which he came regarding its origin and its inspiration are those accepted by its latest commentators.

Carl August described Weimar society as "the most tiresome on the face of the earth," and Goethe, it is evident, was of the same opinion. Every year, when circumstances permitted, he sought to escape from it for periods of longer or shorter duration. Hitherto Jena had been his refuge from Weimar, but it was in another place that, for a succession of years, he was henceforward to seek serenity and repose. In 1795 he had spent some time in Carlsbad and derived benefit from its baths. Now he was attracted to Carlsbad for a double reason ; it was out of the war zone, which Jena was not, and its baths were specially prescribed for the ailment from which he suffered and which was again giving him trouble.

<sup>1</sup> One of its editors ; the other was Clemens Brentano.



After spending a few weeks in Jena, therefore, he proceeded to Carlsbad at the end of June in company with Riemer, his secretary. Carlsbad, then as now, was a fashionable resort of the rich and the great, and Goethe found himself one of about six hundred and fifty visitors. He complains that social intercourse among the visitors was somewhat stiff, and that there was a prevailing anxiety regarding the impending war; but in Carlsbad he was, at least, relieved from the spectacle of the marching and counter-marching of troops. Settled in the place, Goethe pursued the regular course of life he was to lead at all his subsequent visits. On this occasion he was chiefly interested in the geology of the neighbourhood, which he had the opportunity of studying under the guidance of a local specialist—Joseph Müller.<sup>1</sup> His stay was prolonged till the beginning of August, and so pleasant and beneficial had been his experience that henceforth Carlsbad, as he tells us, was to be to him what Jena had hitherto been. He was to find in Carlsbad what was a necessity of his life—solitude varied by cheerful society, and, always a pleasing experience for Goethe, the opportunity of making acquaintance with exalted persons.

On August 11 he was back in Weimar, and was hardly settled there before the impending war-cloud threatened to break, and that in his own near neighbourhood. While he had been spending his time pleasantly in Carlsbad, events of European importance had been happening, events which were to touch himself closely. On July 12 was formed the Confederation of the Rhine which was joined by sixteen German princes with Napoleon as their president, and on August 6 the Emperor Francis of Austria proclaimed the dissolution of the Holy German Empire—an event, Goethe records, which disturbed him less than a quarrel between his servant and his coachman on the driver's seat. He was

<sup>1</sup> Landscape-painting was a special occupation of Goethe during his successive visits to Carlsbad.

soon made to realize that he had his own concern in these world movements. On August 7 Prussia mobilized her troops, and Carl August, at the head of his company, joined them at Niederrossla, their headquarters, where (September 24) Goethe had a long and serious interview with him. It was now apparent that the decisive struggle would come somewhere in the neighbourhood of Weimar, many of whose inhabitants, including all the Ducal family except the Duchess Luise, fled from the town. Goethe was among those who chose to remain.

Early in the morning of October 14 the sound of cannon, coming from the direction of Jena, was heard by the people of Weimar. The cannonade continued all the forenoon, and as Goethe and his household sat at dinner about three o'clock in the afternoon, bullets were whistling over the town.<sup>1</sup> It had been a general impression, which Goethe did not share, that the Prussian army would prove more than a match for the French, and, when some Prussian soldiery appeared, it was at first believed that the French had been defeated. The true state of affairs was soon apparent; the Prussians entered the town in headlong flight closely pursued by the victorious French. For a time numbers of Prussians remained in the town, but the French, their numbers increasing, at length drove them out, and gave themselves up to indiscriminate plunder. Sixteen Alsatian Hussars made their way into Goethe's house, but behaved with some restraint. In the course of the evening came an officer of Hussars,<sup>2</sup> with the announcement that Marshal Augereau had fixed on Goethe's house as his headquarters. Augereau did not appear till the next day, and Goethe had an uncomfortable experience during the night. Two

<sup>1</sup> Goethe rose from the table and walked in his garden while the cannonade proceeded. He had been made familiar with the sound of bullets and cannon-balls during his Rhine campaign.

<sup>2</sup> This officer was Major von Türckheim, a son of Goethe's former love, Lili Schönemann.

*tirailleurs* broke into the house and insisted on his drinking with them. Subsequently they forced their way into his bedroom, and even threatened his life, when Christiane, who had behaved with great courage throughout all the confusion, with some assistance rescued him from their violence. In the morning Marshal Ney appeared; and, after spending a few hours in the house, left it under the charge of a guard. On the afternoon of the same day Napoleon himself came to Weimar, but did not issue orders for the staying of the pillage till the 16th. Secure through the presence of Augereau, who was under his roof from the 15th to the 17th, Goethe had reason to congratulate himself on the comparatively small loss he had sustained. Its total amount (among the items of which were twelve casks of wine drunk by the French soldiery) he estimated at 2000 dollars, half of his annual salary. His papers, which had been his first care, were untouched.<sup>1</sup>

The eventful night had an interesting sequel. During its horrors "an old purpose" took definite shape in Goethe's mind; he resolved to put his relations to Christiane on a legal footing. Various reasons must have prompted him to the step. His son was growing up to manhood, and it was desirable that he should be legitimized. It was a step, moreover, which Goethe must have felt that he owed to the woman who had given every proof of her devoted affection to him. Her past relation to him had placed her in a position that subjected her to needless pain; as his mistress, she had been made sport of by the students of Jena, and during that "dreadful night" the French soldiery, recognizing her position, had treated her with insult. On October 17 Goethe requested the Court Preacher Gunther to perform the ceremony of marriage, which was duly celebrated on the 19th in the sacristy of the Court Church in the presence of his son August and his secretary

<sup>1</sup> It should be said that the narratives of the events of the day and night differ considerably in details.



Riemer.<sup>1</sup> It was hardly to be expected that, even as the acknowledged wife of Goethe, Christiane would be generally received on an equal footing by the ladies of Weimar. Her position, however, was in some degree improved, and in one house, at least, she was received and treated with all respect. In the spring of the year the mother of the philosopher Schopenhauer had settled in Weimar, and as she was a woman of notable force of mind and character, her house soon became a centre of its society. Goethe was greatly attracted by her, and her parties became almost the only ones at which he appeared. It was at Madame Schopenhauer's that Goethe first publicly introduced Christiane as his wife, and thenceforward she was a frequent visitor at the house. Only on one or two occasions did she appear at Court, and she attained to no more than a bowing acquaintance with the Weimar ladies in general, Frau von Stein among them.

Goethe regarded the disintegration of Germany with indifference, but he was profoundly concerned for the well-being of the Duchy of Saxe-Weimar and its ruler. The condition of the Duchy had for some time been such as to make him seriously anxious for its future. By attaching himself to Prussia, an association against which Goethe, during his first years in Weimar, had persistently warned him, the Duke had incurred the wrath of Napoleon, who before the battle of Jena had surrounded him with spies. The probabilities were that, as the result of the battle, he would be deprived of his Dukedom. By the heroic conduct of his wife, the high-minded Luise, he was offered conditions on which he would be allowed to retain it. During his brief stay in Weimar Napoleon had been greatly impressed by her character and heroic bearing, and at her intercession he consented to the Duke's retaining his dominions

<sup>1</sup> The marriage rings were dated October 14—possibly to mark the fact that on that date Goethe resolved on the step. He remarked at this time that he had always regarded Christiane as his wife.



if, within twenty-four hours, he left the Prussian army, withdrew his contingent, and returned to Weimar. The Duke did not immediately return to Weimar, but eventually (December 24), by formally joining the Confederation of the Rhine, he satisfied Napoleon's conditions.

In connection with the treatment of the Duke by the French we have the record of an outburst on the part of Goethe which, if correctly reported, shows at once his devotion to the Duke and his own high-strung nature. It is J. D. Falk, Councillor of Legation, who reports it.<sup>1</sup> The Duke's conduct, Falk ventured to tell Goethe, had been, at least, highly imprudent. This, we know, was Goethe's own real opinion, but he vehemently denounced the conduct of the French and defended that of the Duke,<sup>2</sup> and conjured up a piteous vision of the Duke driven from his dominions and, with himself as his only attendant, wandering in exile through the country. Then, tears streaming down his cheeks, he burst forth: "I will sing for bread; I will turn strolling ballad-singer and put our misfortunes into verses; I will wander into every village and into every school, wherever the name of Goethe is known; I will sing the dishonour of Germany, and the children shall learn the song of our shame till they are men!"<sup>3</sup>

Goethe was spared the fate of Lucas Kranach<sup>4</sup> to whom in his melancholy vision he compared himself; but he was able to perform services for his master of which he alone was capable. As the result of the battle of Jena, the daily life of that town and of Weimar was in utter confusion, aggravated by the conflicting political sympathies of their citizens. Uncertainty regarding the future was also a disquieting consideration, for, as Goethe told Wolf, it was at

<sup>1</sup> Falk's reports of his conversations with Goethe have always to be taken with certain reserves.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe blamed the Prussians for Napoleon's treatment of the Duke.

<sup>3</sup> This translation is from Mrs. Austin's *Characteristics of Goethe*.

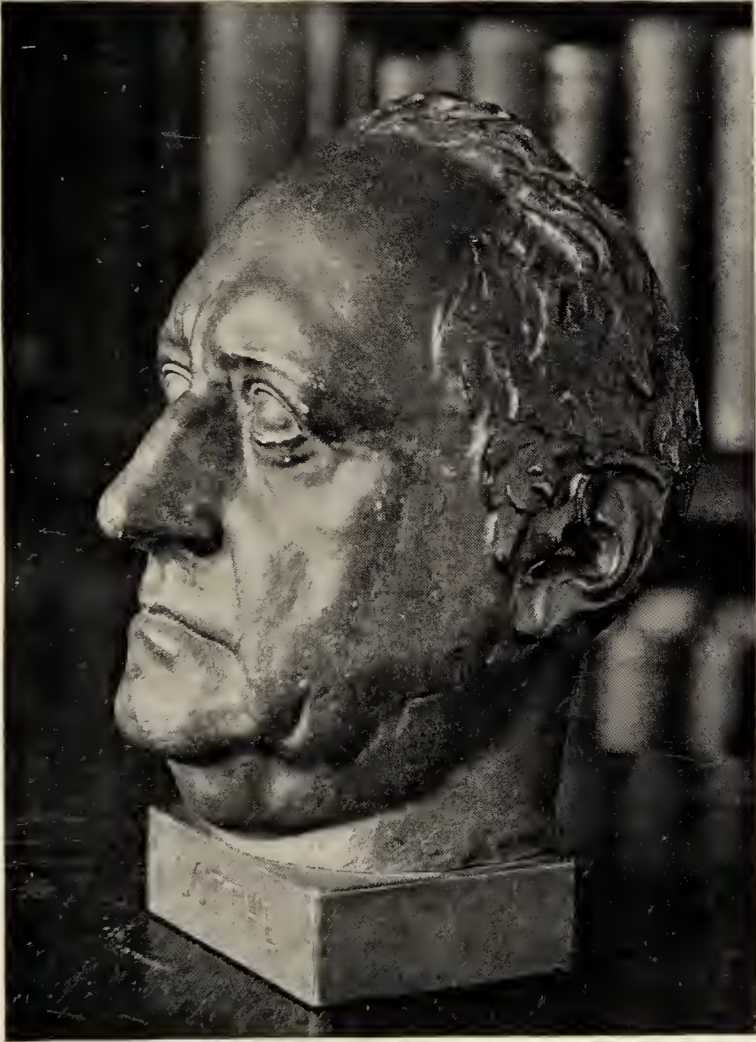
<sup>4</sup> Lucas Kranach distinguished himself by his devotion to his master Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, in his misfortunes.

least doubtful what his own position would be in the course of half a year. Moreover, for some months after the battle, French troops were quartered in Weimar, and their maintenance was a heavy burden. Under these conditions Goethe displayed the same energy and capacity as an administrator as he had shown in earlier years as a Minister of State. It was now his task to assist such of the citizens of Weimar and Jena as had suffered most in the late calamity, and he freely gave of his own for their relief.<sup>1</sup> Further, he set himself to restore the ordinary life in both towns, and this could be best effected by reopening their public institutions. Fortunately he found a willing helper in the Commandant of the French soldiery quartered in Weimar, a General Dentzner who had formerly been a student at Jena and was an admirer of Goethe's genius. As the result of his efforts, lectures were recommenced in the University of Jena on November 3; on the 5th the Institute of Drawing in Weimar was reopened, and in December its theatre. Be it added that, except during the few days when repose was impossible, he had throughout the troubled year been assiduously pursuing his own studies. In April he finished the First Part of *Faust*, in December the didactic part of the *Farbenlehre*, and he was at the same time engaged on the edition of his collective works.

By the beginning of 1807 Weimar had returned to its ordinary routine of business and pleasure, and throughout the year there was peace in Germany, the battle of Jena having temporarily brought her to Napoleon's feet.<sup>2</sup> The external events of Goethe's life during the year may be briefly told. Till the middle of May he was in Weimar, much occupied with the theatre, the most notable pieces produced being his own *Tasso*, and Calderon's *The Steadfast*

<sup>1</sup> In a note addressed to Meyer (Oct. 15) Goethe inquires if he can send him a coat, vest, shirt or other articles of clothing, or food of any kind.

<sup>2</sup> Prussia made peace with France in July.



GOETHE: OCTOBER, 1807.

[Facing p. 538.]





*Prince.* On April 10 Goethe sustained a real loss by the death of the Duchess Amalia. She had been his staunch friend since his first settlement in Weimar; she had stood by him in the days when Weimar and the outside world were most hostile to him; and she had been his ardent supporter in all his labours for the material and intellectual well-being of the Duchy.<sup>1</sup> A few days after her death, a violent recurrence of his old malady necessitated another sojourn in Carlsbad, where, after about a week spent in Jena, he settled from the end of May till the beginning of September. Though he saw something of the society of the place, the state of his health enforced a solitude assiduously devoted to geologizing, painting, and the writing of tales subsequently embodied in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Among the persons he met at Carlsbad, Goethe attached special importance to Carl Friedrich, Graf von Reinhard. Reinhard was a cultivated man of the world and had had a chequered history. He was now French resident at Jassy, though suspected and disliked by Napoleon, who, however, could not dispense with his services. The friendship which Goethe formed with him was permanent, and at a later day Reinhard was to do him an important service. A strong tie between them was Reinhard's acceptance of Goethe's theory of light—always a sure passport to his confidence. On September 11, he was back in Weimar, and he closed the year (November—December<sup>2</sup>) in Jena, where, as we shall see, he had an enlivening experience.

These were the external events of Goethe's life during 1807, but the year is marked by a further growth in sympathies and interests which had begun to appear before Schiller's death. We have mentioned his interest in the *Wunderhorn* and the *Nibelungenlied*, and his production on the Weimar stage of *The*

<sup>1</sup> Goethe wrote a short account of her life which was read in all the churches of the duchy.

<sup>2</sup> Till December 18.

*Steadfast Prince* of Calderon—the poet of the Romantics' idolatry. But a personal experience and certain accidental circumstances occasioned his making a further concession to Romanticism. During his visits to Jena there was no house where he had spent happier hours than that of the Fromman family, whose head was a bookseller and a man of cultivated tastes. Fromman, his wife, and the distinguished guests who frequented the house made it an attractive centre for discussions on literature and art. But during the visit in the closing months of 1807<sup>1</sup> he found a new object of attraction under the familiar roof. Some years earlier the Frommans had adopted a girl, Wilhelmina Herzlieb whose winning appearance and ways had made her a special favourite of Goethe.<sup>2</sup> He had always treated her as a child, but since he had last seen her, she had developed into womanhood, and as he now saw her, she inspired him with new feelings. He could no longer meet her without embarrassment, and he studiously curtailed his visits to the house. The arrival of another person gave a fresh turn to the interests of the circle in Jena, with which Goethe was immediately connected. This was Zacharias Werner, the most bizarre of all the young Romantics, but a professed worshipper of Goethe's genius. A play of his, *Martin Luther*, recently produced in Berlin, had achieved an extraordinary success, and Goethe was prepared to be interested in him. Though his play and other things which Werner had written showed most of the weaknesses which Goethe deplored in the new school, he recognized Werner's poetic gifts and was attracted to the man. There were interesting conversations between them on art and literature and religion, and Werner read aloud a series of sonnets which Goethe thought the finest hitherto produced in German literature. The sonnet-form was a special favourite with the Romantics,

<sup>1</sup> It lasted from November 11 to December 18.

<sup>2</sup> She was now eighteen, and he had known her since she was ten.

but Goethe had disapproved of it as unsuited to the German language. Apparently carried away by Werner's enthusiasm and by their admiration for his success, Goethe, Riemer, and Knebel engaged in a competition in sonnet-writing, Minna Herzlieb being the inspiring theme. Of the seventeen sonnets which Goethe wrote, only a few directly refer to Minna, and in the circumstances in which they were written, they could hardly give expression to the passion with which she had inspired him.<sup>1</sup> That his feelings towards her amounted to a passion, he subsequently admitted. He had loved Minchen, he told Christiane, "more than was reasonable."<sup>2</sup> And there is other evidence that the effort to give her up cost him a severe inward struggle; he found it necessary to have recourse to his usual method of ridding his heart of "perilous stuff." Two works produced during this period, *Pandora* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, he tells us, "express the bitter feeling of deprivation" he experienced in the renunciation of Minna Herzlieb.

In the same year, 1807, Goethe's path was crossed by another woman whose name, though for other reasons, is as indissolubly associated with his as is that of Minna Herzlieb. In Bettina Brentano Romanticism was embodied in feminine form. She was the daughter of Maximiliane von la Roche who had been one of Goethe's own early loves, and who had made an uncongenial marriage with Peter Brentano, a dealer in herrings, oil and cheese, and a widower with five children. The saying went in Frankfort, where the family was settled, that where madness ended in other people, it only began with the Brentanos, and in Bettina the family traits were fully developed. When we come upon her, she was in her twenty-second year, but she was one of those

<sup>1</sup> In one of his sonnets Goethe jestingly refers to his using that verse form of which he had previously disapproved.

<sup>2</sup> He made a similar admission to Zelter. He never declared his feelings to her, and she never appears to have suspected them.



persons who, with eminent gifts, remain children to the end. From reading Goethe's books she had become convinced that he personified all that her mind and heart conceived of what was highest and best in this world. Her imagination was still further inflamed by intercourse with Goethe's mother, whose one delight in life was to talk and hear talk of her son, and she resolved to pay her devotions in person to the god of her idolatry. If we can take as a statement of fact the account which she gave to Goethe's mother of the first interview with her son, it gives us the key at which her emotions were pitched. He placed her on a sofa, but after some talk she said that she could not remain sitting there. "Make yourself comfortable," said the great man, whereupon she threw her arms round his neck, and, tired with the journey, fell asleep in that position. "To reassure ourselves," is the comment of a French critic," we have to remember that we are in Germany."<sup>1</sup> The relations thus effusively begun were, on Goethe's part, those of amused interest at her irrepressible nature and admiration of gifts which have entitled her to be called the most *spirituelle* of all German women. Four years later Bettina married the Romantic poet, Ludwig Achim von Arnim, and on the occasion of another visit to Weimar, in company with her husband, she gave lasting offence to Goethe by publicly insulting Christiane.<sup>2</sup> Bettina was not one of the women who deeply touched his feeling and inspired his work, but she has her own place in his life. Through her he was brought more closely into contact with the Romantic movement, and to her he was indebted for information regarding his youthful days which she learned from his mother and which he embodied in his Autobiography. Moreover, three years after his death she published a work<sup>3</sup> professing to consist of their correspondence,

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, Vol. II. *Goethe et Bettina*.

<sup>2</sup> She revisited Weimar in 1826, when Goethe regarded her more critically.

<sup>3</sup> *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kind*.



which form a permanent part of the Goethe literature. She irresponsibly adapted both Goethe's letters and her own, and even appropriated what Goethe had written to others.<sup>1</sup> But, read with indulgence, the book, with the amount of truth about Goethe it really contains, is a charming memorial of a woman's hero-worship.

Two events made the year 1808 a memorable one in Goethe's life—the death of his mother, and his interviews with Napoleon. Like the year preceding, it was spent partly in Weimar and partly in Carlsbad. From January till the middle of May the poet was in Weimar—a household event of that period being the departure of his son August for the University of Heidelberg, where he was to spend two years in the study of jurisprudence. On May 15 he was in Carlsbad where, with the exception of a few brief excursions, he passed the next four months in fruitful labours. The new friendships he formed there were part of the attraction to Carlsbad, and in connection with this visit he specially notes his intercourse with the family of Ziegesar, the head of which was Chancellor of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. The youngest daughter, Sylvie, whom he had known since her childhood, was the member of the family that specially attracted him, and she is among the number of maidens who inspired him to song, though she was never one of the objects of his passion.

On September 17 he was again in Weimar, and a few days later he received news of the death of his mother. Her end had been in keeping with her life. Invincible cheerfulness, the result partly of temperament and partly of her unwavering trust in Providence, had made her life a pleasant journey, joy-giving to all with whom she came in contact. Her gay humour was illustrated in the directions she laid down for her funeral; she gave strict orders that there should not be too many raisins in the burial cake as she could not abide them herself. Knowing

<sup>1</sup> Specially passages from his sonnets to Minna Herzlieb.

her son's shrinking from all forms of pain, a characteristic he had inherited from her, she forbade the news of her illness to be communicated to him. He had not seen her for eleven years, and as there had been long intervals between their previous meetings, he has been charged, as already mentioned, with grave filial neglect. As was previously noted, Dr. Johnson is open to precisely the same charge, and it has been pointed out that Klopstock, Lessing, and Wieland, were similarly remiss in their visits to their nearest relatives. Goethe's mother, at least, never dropped a word of reproach against him for any neglect,<sup>1</sup> and from what we can gather from their correspondence and from the reports of other their relations were all that could be desired between mother and son. To the end she followed his career with pride and loving admiration, and the thought of him was the sustaining joy of her life. Goethe, on his part, fully realized all that he owed to his mother; he recognized that it was from her that he had derived the best portion of his gifts; and in his Autobiography he has put on record how it was owing to her genial and communicative nature that any sweetness and charm entered into the memories of his childhood. The most equitable of critics, Sainte-Beuve, who speaks on such a point with special authority, as he himself was an exemplary son, thus pronounces judgment on the relations between Goethe and his mother. "Before denying any quality to Goethe it is necessary to look at him twice, for the first impression of him is that of a certain coldness, but this coldness often gives place to the primary persisting quality. A mother does not continue to the last hour to love and revere a son as she did, if he has done her a grave wrong. Goethe's mother found her son guilty of no such wrong, and it is not for us to be more severe than she was."

During the September in which Goethe lost his

<sup>1</sup> She wrote these words to her grandson August: "Dein lieber Vater hat mir nie Kummer oder Verdruss verursacht."

mother, an event was impending which might involve the fate of the Duchy of Saxe-Weimar, and therefore his own future position. Napoleon, now "King of Kings," had summoned a congress of potentates to meet at Erfurt which, since the battle of Jena, the French had retained as a stronghold in the heart of Germany. The Congress was to meet in the beginning of October, and Napoleon's object in summoning it was to settle the relations of the different European States. Carl August, we have seen, had been compelled, as the result of Prussia's defeat at Jena, to join the Confederation of the Rhine. But he was suspected, and on good grounds, of acting in hostility to its interests. How he would fare at Napoleon's hands, therefore, was matter of grave anxiety to himself and his minister Goethe.

We are here concerned only with Goethe's experiences in connection with the Congress. On September 29 he was summoned by the Duke to Erfurt, where he found himself in a scene which may have recalled the coronation of the Emperor which he had witnessed at Frankfort in his childhood. Goethe was always interested in the great ones of the earth, not certainly from a vulgar curiosity, but out of his impelling instinct to know men in all their conditions; and in Erfurt this interest was gratified to the full, for besides the dominating divinity Napoleon, and Alexander, Czar of Russia, there were present at the Congress over forty kings, princes and dukes. An intenser satisfaction to him than the sight of these exalted persons, however, was another spectacle. Napoleon had brought in his train the whole troupe of the Théâtre Français with Talma at their head, and Goethe had the opportunity of seeing them play Racine's *Andromaque*.<sup>1</sup> For Goethe, who had given his heart and mind for so many years to the improvement of the Weimar stage, the sight of Talma and his company playing in such

<sup>1</sup> This was on the evening of September 29; the following evening *Britannicus* was played.



extraordinary circumstances was one of the crowning experiences of his life, nor did it lessen his satisfaction that he had the impression that his own Weimar company compared not unfavourably with the most famous company in Europe.

But the culminating incident of his days in Erfurt came on October 2—his interview with Napoleon, which he himself describes as one of the most highly gratifying experiences that could have happened to him in life. We have a brief account of the interview from his own hand. On entering Napoleon's presence he found him seated at breakfast, with Talleyrand, Daru, Savary and Berthier in attendance. "Vous êtes un homme," was Napoleon's first remark after a fixed look at Goethe, as he stood waiting to be addressed. The conversation then began. "How old are you?" "Sixty." "You are well preserved. You have written tragedies." At this point Daru, who had literary tastes, intervened with a warm laudation of Goethe's work, and specially mentioned that he had translated Voltaire's *Mahomet*—a play which Napoleon sharply condemned as doing injustice to one of the world's great men. Napoleon then turned the talk on *Werther* which he said he had carefully studied, and pointed out what he thought a fault in the book.<sup>1</sup> "Why did you do that?" he asked. Goethe smilingly admitted the fault, and added that a poet might be pardoned if he sought means to extricate himself from a difficulty. Napoleon signified his approval, and then spoke of the drama in general with an insight which greatly impressed Goethe. One remark which he reports is characteristically Napoleonic. Referring to dramas in which fate was the determining agency, he said that such things belonged to another age. "What have we now to do with fate?" he asked. "Politics

<sup>1</sup> Goethe does not mention the fault, but it is conjectured that it was his assigning Werther's mortification at his treatment by his superiors when he was in office, as well as his hopeless passion for Charlotte, as a motive for his suicide. Wieland and Herder made the same criticism.



is fate." The entrance of Marshal Soult turned Napoleon's attention for a few moments to Poland; then addressing himself again to Goethe, he questioned him on his personal affairs, and his relations to the ducal family, and graciously dismissed him.<sup>1</sup> What gave special gratification to Goethe in the course of the interview was that Napoleon spoke to him throughout on terms of equality (*Gleich gegen Gleich*). On Goethe's expressing his opinion, he signified his approval; and when he expressed his own, he usually added: "Qu'en dit M. Göt?"

A few days later Goethe had the opportunity of further talk with Napoleon, who, accompanied by the Czar of Russia, went to Weimar on October 6. In the evening the French company played Voltaire's *La Mort de César*, and there followed a great ball during which Napoleon had several conversations with Wieland and Goethe. It is only Napoleon's remarks that have been preserved.<sup>2</sup> Tragedy, he said, should be the training-school of kings and peoples, and is the highest achievement of the poet. A tragedy on the death of Cæsar, for example, would be the most beautiful work which Goethe could accomplish, as he would be able to show, what Voltaire in his tragedy had not done, that the death of Cæsar was a blunder.<sup>3</sup> Speaking of Tacitus, he denounced him for his prejudices, his obscurity, and his detestable style. He expressed his wonder that Goethe should admire Shakespeare, who mixes comedy with tragedy, the terrible with the burlesque, and that a great spirit such as he should not like *les genres tranchés*. And he pressed Goethe to come to Paris, where he would gain a wider outlook on the world and a superabundance of materials for poetical treatment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to Chancellor von Müller, Napoleon was overheard to say to Berthier and Daru as Goethe left the room, "Voilà un homme!"

<sup>2</sup> It is J. W. Falk who reports them.

<sup>3</sup> A tragedy on Julius Cæsar was one of the abortive plans of Goethe's youth.

<sup>4</sup> Napoleon conferred the Cross of the Legion of Honour on Goethe and Wieland.

For public as well as for personal reasons Goethe had every reason to be satisfied with Napoleon. He had looked forward with grave anxiety to the possible results of the Congress for the future of the Duchy, but it was Napoleon's interest to conciliate the German princes with the object of strengthening the Confederation of the Rhine, and he followed this policy in the case of Carl August. He relieved Weimar from sending a contingent to Spain, where the French armies were now fighting, and he presented Jena with 300,000 francs as an indemnity for the losses it had sustained by the battle. As a result, there was a general feeling that Germany might find peace and happiness under French domination—an event which would not have discomposed Goethe. Now that he had seen and spoken with the man Napoleon in the flesh, the opinion he had already formed of him as one of the "dæmonic" forces that have at times determined human destinies was deepened to something like awe. The terms in which he spoke of him show that he regarded him as incommensurable; he was "the greatest intelligence the world had ever seen," "the loftiest spectacle that was possible in history," "the compendium of the world." That he had lived to see such a phenomenon in human affairs was for Goethe simply an experience which enlarged his own conception of the powers of nature.<sup>1</sup>

The close of 1808 brought another pleasant experience for Goethe. During November, December, and part of the following January, A. W. Humboldt was coming and going between Jena and Weimar, and was for some time his guest. From Humboldt's letters written during these months we have a few interesting notes regarding Goethe's surroundings

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, then living in Jena, was as much impressed as Goethe by Napoleon's part in the scheme of things. "I saw the Emperor, this World-Soul," he wrote, "riding through the town to make a reconnaissance. It is indeed a remarkable sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here on one point and sitting on a horse, holds the world in his grip and rules it."

and his state of mind at the time. He was struck by his careful consideration for Christiane and his anxiety to establish her in Weimar society, though he notes that, while Goethe addressed her as "du," she addressed him as "Sie." He found Goethe full of his interviews with Napoleon, of whom he always spoke as "my Kaiser."<sup>1</sup> Regarding the state of literature in Germany he was in despair, and to Humboldt's intense regret was more concerned about its hopeless outlook than about the domination of the French. The best thing that could happen to the Germans, he said, would be their dispersion among other nations like the Jews, as at home they were intolerable; and an anecdote which Humboldt relates is a notable illustration of what in his heart was his real feeling towards the prevailing literary tendencies of the time.<sup>2</sup> At table one day Goethe invited Zacharias Werner, who was on another visit to Weimar, to read aloud any poems he had lately written. Werner declaimed in such a ludicrous fashion that the listeners had difficulty in restraining their mirth, but all went well till he read a sonnet in which their host was compared with the moon. This was too much for Goethe, who, in a towering rage, used such strong language that Werner had to leave the room, and with some difficulty made his peace through the intervention of Christiane. "God be thanked," Goethe is reported to have exclaimed about the same time; "there are still among the learned in Weimar more heathens than neo-Christians."

Goethe says of the year 1809 that he must always retain a pleasant memory of it as a year of "notable successes," but it was a disastrous year for Germany. It saw the first attempt at a war of liberation, an attempt which ended in miserable failure.

<sup>1</sup> Humboldt also notes that Goethe constantly wore the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

<sup>2</sup> Humboldt was not present at the scene. It is described by H. Steffens, *Gespräche*, II. 13-14.



Napoleon, suspecting that Austria, taking advantage of his difficulties in Spain, was preparing for war, goaded her into overt action, and in the course of the summer and autumn decisively broke her power. Goethe, as he constantly reiterates, held himself deliberately aloof from politics, but he could not escape the existing conditions. The state of his health was such as would have necessitated another sojourn in Carlsbad, but Carlsbad was in the war zone, and he had to spend the year partly in Weimar and partly in Jena, two places, he wrote to Zelter, which the Prussians would long ago have destroyed if they could. The "notable successes" he was able to secure were mainly the improvement of the Weimar Library, and the completion of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, which work and *Pandora* are his only two creative efforts of larger scope during the period we are considering.

As we leave him at this point, we may have before us the impression he made on one who bears an honoured name, not only in Germany, but wherever high character and splendid service to scholarship are appreciated. In December, 1809, Wilhelm Grimm, the younger of the two famous brothers, spent some time in Weimar and paid several visits to Goethe, whose reception of him he thus describes. "I had often seen his portrait and was perfectly familiar with it, and yet, how I was surprised by the majesty, perfection, candour, and goodness of that countenance! In friendly tones he bade me sit down and began to talk. . . . I remained almost an hour with him; he spoke with such friendliness and goodness that I did not always remember what a great man he is; only when I had gone or when he was silent, did I realize it, and realize, also, how kindly he must be and how little pride he must have, to converse with one of so little importance, to whom he had nothing special to say." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gespräche*, II. 58-9.



## CHAPTER XXX

### PANDORA—DIE WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN

WE have seen how Goethe, in spite of conditions that would have arrested the productiveness of most men, turned out a considerable tale of literary work between 1805 and 1809. During these years he continued his labours at his *Farbenlehre*, superintended a complete edition of his works, published the First Part of *Faust*, wrote the fragment *Pandora*, and produced in its entirety, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. In one direction of his creative activity, however, this period presents a striking contrast to the period during which he had Schiller by his side. A remarkable result of his intercourse with Schiller had been the number and variety of shorter poems he had poured forth from year to year; but of such poems the period immediately succeeding Schiller's death is singularly barren. His poverty of production in this vein may have a simple explanation; the loss of Schiller, his own frequent ill health, the depressing political atmosphere of the time lowered his vitality and rendered less frequent the recurrence of those moods which find expression in occasional poetry. As it is, we have only some half a dozen shorter things from his hand during all these five years. The best known and most remarkable of them has already been mentioned—the epilogue to Schiller's *Glocke*, written shortly after Schiller's death. The remaining pieces were produced at long intervals. To 1806 belongs *Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas!* a parody of a church song by a contemporary which stirred Goethe's wrath by its

disparagement of earthly pleasures. In 1807-8 were written the Sonnets associated with Minna Herzlieb ; in 1808 *Der Goldschmiedsgesell* and *Wirkung in die Ferne*, two playful pieces conceived in his best humour; and in 1809 *Johanna Sebus*, a ballad commemorating the act of a girl who lost her life in the attempt to rescue her family from drowning. Such is the meagre tale of Goethe's efforts in this special line of his poetical activities during the years 1805-9 ; during the period before us his powers found exercise along other lines.

*Pandora* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* are Goethe's two most memorable productions during our period, but there is a slighter performance that deserves a passing reference as remarkably illustrating his attitude to the political conditions of the time. We have seen how the action of Carl August in taking part with Prussia in her war against Napoleon had imperilled his possession of the Duchy. As it happened, he was allowed to retain it, though at the cost of both a material and a moral sacrifice. He had had to pay a heavy indemnity, and he had been forced to join the Confederation of the Rhine which acknowledged Napoleon as its head. In July, 1807, Prussia made peace with France, and in the following September the whole ducal family returned to Weimar, whence, with the exception of the Duchess Luise, all its members had fled before the battle of Jena. For a double reason it seemed to Goethe that the occasion called for some special celebration ; the reassembling of the ducal family was an auspicious event, and, moreover, their return implied the inauguration of what appeared to be a settled peace. The form chosen for the celebration was, as we know, a favourite one with Goethe—an emblematic representation of the events and circumstances that were immediately present to the minds of the spectators. The title given to the piece explains its intention : *Prelude for the Opening of the Weimar Theatre on September 19, 1807, after*

*the Happy Return of the Ducal Family.* The characters are the Goddess of War, a Fugitive, Majesty, and Peace. The Goddess opens the representation with a speech expressing her fiendish joy in all the horrors she has recently wrought, and she is followed by the Fugitive who draws a piteous picture of the desolation caused by the hosts from which he is fleeing. There follows a dialogue between Majesty and Peace, in which the former enunciates Goethe's political philosophy—that public and private interests alike are best served by the citizen who attends most diligently to his own business ; and the latter bestows her blessing on the land now happily relieved from the horrors of war. As has been said, the piece calls for a special reference, not on account of its literary merit, but for another reason. The peace which Goethe hailed had been effected by Napoleon's victories, and it was to be maintained under his sway. That the poet should have announced thus publicly and unmistakably his acceptance of French ascendancy in Germany is a remarkable illustration of his indifference to national feeling, and, in view of Carl August's past action and of what Goethe knew to be his personal sympathies, the whole performance must be considered a bold venture on the part of a Minister in the face of his sovereign.<sup>1</sup>

*Pandora* may be regarded as an illustration of the saying of Wagner that, while Napoleon was engaged with the *Schein* of things, Goethe was engaged with their *Wesen*. Goethe regarded Napoleon with wondering interest as a dæmonic force let loose by nature for the world's astonishment, and, if the result of his career had been the establishment of a European peace, he would willingly have accepted his universal domination. But, even if this result were achieved, mankind would in Goethe's view have been brought only a very little way. For the

<sup>1</sup> Goethe calls the piece *einen seltsamen Prolog*. The majority of the audience, as well as Carl August, must have been out of sympathy with the opinions it expressed.



perfection of humanity, other influences must be operative in men's hearts and minds—influences which are to be found only in the conception of beauty as involving all goodness and all truth; and *Pandora*, which unfortunately remained a fragment, is Goethe's attempt to embody this idea.

As had often happened, it was an external prompting that induced him to make a beginning with *Pandora*. Two young friends who were about to found a journal in Vienna, to be entitled *Prometheus*, asked him for a contribution, and as the myth of Prometheus had long interested him,<sup>1</sup> he eagerly seized the opportunity of embodying the conceptions which were already formed in his mind. He received his friends' invitation at the end of October, 1807, and on the way to his memorable sojourn in Jena at the close of that year he communicated to Riemer the plan of the whole. He was in Jena from November 11, and between that date and December 2 he wrote rather more than half of the fragment we possess. How he was diverted from prosecuting his task at this time, we have already learned; on December 1 Zacharias Werner arrived, and there followed that sonnet-competition in which Goethe took part. But what he did write in Jena proves that an element entered into his work which was foreign to its original conception. It was characteristic of Goethe at all times that he could not exclude from any creative work on which he was engaged any intense experience through which at the time he happened to be passing. His infatuation for Minna Herzlieb was such an experience, and it is his own confession that *Pandora* gives expression to "the bitter feeling of deprivation" occasioned by his having to renounce her. And the experience was fortunate in the interests of the poem, for it re-awakened the failing ardours of youth and communicated to a work, which otherwise might have been a

<sup>1</sup> In his youth he had written a remarkable fragment on the Prometheus myth.



piece of cold symbolism, a glow and intensity of feeling unsurpassed in any other of Goethe's writings. Not till the spring of the following year did he resume and complete the fragment as we have it, but in the interval there had been no cooling of his feelings, as the second half is even more powerfully charged with emotion than the first.

It is difficult to give an account of a work which one of Goethe's German biographers describes as "the hardest to understand" of any he gave to the world. Goethe himself says of it that, as a whole, it must work on its readers "as it were mysteriously," but that the individual reader may understand and appropriate details which appeal to himself. Its principal personages, all symbolical of qualities and tendencies, are six in number: the two brothers, Epimetheus and Prometheus; Elpore (Hope) and Epimeleia (Diligence), daughters of Epimetheus by Pandora (who does not appear in the fragment<sup>1</sup>); Phileros (one prone to love), the son of Prometheus; and Eos (Dawn); while a crowd of subsidiary figures—smiths, shepherds, fishers and others—occasionally appear and give expression to the interests which they symbolize. The scenery to be presented to the audience suggested the different preoccupations of the two brothers. To the left was a mountainous country, the domain of Prometheus, in which a busy mining community pursued their labours; to the right was the domain of Epimetheus, in which the most prominent object was a wooden building of antique structure, surrounded by others of like pattern but on a smaller scale, and situated in a rural country, where gardening and agriculture are the occupations of the inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

There is little causal connection between the successive scenes. Their interest lies in the contrasted passions and ideals of the characters who

<sup>1</sup> Goethe originally entitled the work *Pandoras Wiederkunft*; but as Pandora does not appear, it was simply called *Pandora*.

The scenery is described as "after Poussin."

appear in them, though Epimetheus, with his dream of Pandora, may be regarded as the central figure round whom the drama develops. A leading conception in the fragment is the contrast between the ideals of Prometheus and of Epimetheus. Prometheus finds complete satisfaction in the work of his mining community, and, convinced that toil and strife are inevitable conditions imposed on man, is content to accept the world as he finds it. Epimetheus, on the other hand, is the idealist, incapable of finding satisfaction in the prose of life. He consumes his days in laments for the loss of Pandora, who embodied all his ideals, and who, after sojourning with him for a time, had left him and taken with her their daughter Elpore. Into the passionate laments of Epimetheus for the lost Pandora Goethe has poured his own experience resulting from his passion for Minna Herzlieb. The one incident in the fragment, and it is its darkest mystery, is associated with the loves of Phileros and Epimeleia. Under a misapprehension, which reminds us that we are in a primitive society, Phileros attempts to murder Epimeleia, but she is saved by Prometheus, who banishes his son from his presence. All is eventually explained, however, and the happy union of the lovers effected. By the intervention of Eos (Dawn), Phileros, who had attempted to drown himself, is safely brought to land, attended by a concourse of fishers and dolphins, and Epimeleia is rescued from a conflagration in her father's woods. The fragment ends with a dialogue between Prometheus and Eos, in which Goethe comes nearest to a plain statement of his drift. Prometheus says that he desires nothing new in the world, which is already sufficiently established and provided, and in which man will find content if he will but set himself to combine the experience of his past with the experience of the present. The reply of Eos occupies the concluding lines, and we may take it as expressing the primary conception of the fragment :—

Gross beginnet ihr Titanen ; aber leiten  
Zu dem ewig Guten, ewig Schönen,  
Ist der Götter Werk ; die lasst gewähren !

As the projected continuation of the drama is sketched by Goethe, Pandora was to drop her box on earth—to the satisfaction of Phileros, but to the displeasure of Prometheus, whose warriors were to be prevented from breaking it open by the intervention of his smiths. As the box was to be again threatened with violence, Pandora was herself to appear, bringing with her “beauty, piety, peace, and sabbath rest.” The box was then to open of itself in a temple dedicated to science and art, over which Phileros and Epimeleia were to preside as priest and priestess. Epimetheus, rejuvenated, was to be borne to Olympus by Pandora, and in the concluding scene Elpore Thraseia (Confident Hope) was to present herself to the spectators.

From this brief sketch the nature of the work will be sufficiently apparent. In details, as in the whole, it is pure symbolism from beginning to end, and opens up an interminable field of conjecture alike regarding the precise import of the personages themselves, the opinions they express, and the scenes in which they appear. In *Das Märchen* Goethe had already provided an example of the symbolical treatment of a theme, and in the Second Part of *Faust* he was to give himself free play. That it was an aberration from true art the world in general is agreed. Groping his way in a land of shadows, the reader receives no definite impressions whose cumulative effect results in the conception of a definite whole. Fortunately, as has been said, the factitious scheme of the work, as Goethe originally conceived it, came to be charged with an element whose presence, in greater or less degree, is felt throughout the whole poem. The songs of Epimetheus and Epimeleia reproduce the personal note of Goethe's own “deprivation,” and it is agreed that nowhere has he displayed his poetic resources in greater plenitude than



in these songs. Here, instead of the studied pose of the language of *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, we have all the abandonment of *Götz* and *Werther*, with a richness, variety, and power of expression to which he could not attain in these works of his youth.

*Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*The Elective Affinities*),<sup>1</sup> like *Pandora*, is inspired (Goethe tells us) by the sense of deprivation he experienced on his renunciation of Minna Herzlieb, but in the later work the feeling finds widely different expression. While the prevailing note in *Pandora* is lyrical, in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* we have psychological analysis carried out from first to last with perfect objectivity. Like *Pandora* it was not primarily prompted by his experience with Minna Herzlieb; the conception of the work had long been in his mind, and that experience only gave the immediate stimulus to its production.

Goethe first makes reference to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the summer of 1807; his intercourse with Minna came in November and December of that year, and in the beginning of 1808 he addressed himself to its composition. Like most of Goethe's longer works it was produced under intermittent fits of inspiration, and it was not till October, 1809, that it was given to the world. The theme of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, as a brief outline of it will show, touches the springs of human conduct, and, therefore, the very foundations of human society. The opening chapter of the romance, as it is entitled, clearly indicates what will be its development. Eduard, a rich baron, has been leading a tolerable existence with Charlotte his wife, quietly engaged in the management of his estate. Each is, however, conscious that there is no real bond of sympathy between them—a coldness of relations which is explained by their previous history. In youth they had been lovers, but by the will of their parents both had made marriages of *convenience*.

<sup>1</sup> The word *Wahlverwandtschaften* is the translation of *De attractionibus electivis*, the title of a work on physical science by a Swede, Bergmann.



Freed by the death of their respective partners, they had realized the desire of their youth comparatively late in life, and had married. It was gradually brought home to them that only the memory of their love had prompted their union, and that there was no real affinity of nature between them. This is their relation to each other when we are introduced to them, and it does not surprise us, therefore, when Eduard makes the proposal on which their future fate was to turn. This is that they should invite a friend of his, a Captain in the army, to be their guest for a time, as a pleasant and useful addition to their society. With a sure instinct Charlotte sees dangerous possibilities in the Captain's presence and offers a strong opposition to the proposal. In the conversation that ensues between them, we are made fully aware of their respective characters. Weakly emotional by nature, Eduard had been spoilt in his youth; and, as he comes before us, he is devoid of any sense of the higher obligations of life and incapable of self-control. Charlotte, on the other hand, is acquainted with the world, has a regard for its conventions, thinks of others besides herself, and, calm by temperament, can take a sane view of the consequences of her actions. In a second conversation Eduard returns to the subject, when Charlotte makes the confession that she also has a friend whom she would like to invite as a guest, but that she has refrained from suggesting her coming, as a possible occasion of undesirable consequences. This friend, Ottilie, was a niece of Charlotte's whom she knew to be unhappy at the school where she was placed. She does not tell Eduard that, before her marriage with him, she had tried to effect a union between him and Ottilie, to whom, however, he was not attracted. Eduard now proposes that she should invite Ottilie and that he should invite the Captain—a proposition to which Charlotte at first demurs as a risky experiment for Ottilie and the Captain. Finally, with the remark that we can never know whether such

arrangements will turn out well or ill, she consents to Eduard's inviting the Captain, she being left free to invite Ottilie when she thinks fit.

The Captain, who is the first to appear, proves to be a man of sense and discretion with notable practical talents. A short experience of his presence, however, tends to convince Charlotte that her instincts had not misled her. Eduard becomes pre-occupied with the Captain regarding arrangements on his estate, and she feels that, whereas she had formerly been his confidant in all such matters, she is now being set aside. A conversation that takes place between the three disquiets her, and is a significant commentary on all that is to follow. The Captain was interested in chemistry among other things, and spoke of the attraction that exists between different substances. We have A and B on the one hand, and C and D on the other, he said, apparently inseparably connected, but bring the pairs into each others' presence, and you will see A fly to D and C to B. Half jestingly Eduard suggests that Charlotte should send for Ottilie, and they might then watch the operation of similar affinities in the case of human beings. For reasons of her own Charlotte does invite Ottilie, who soon joins the party.

We are already acquainted with Ottilie's characteristics, since the Lady Superior of the school where she had been placed and a male Assistant, whose heart she had touched, had communicated to Charlotte the impressions that they had formed. She was one of those beings whom Goethe called "problematical" characters, of an intensely brooding nature, tremulously sensitive to her surroundings, both persons and things. A quiet grace, pervading all she says and does, is her distinguishing external characteristic. In her case especially Goethe has sought to show what he understood by the action of "elective affinities" in the case of human beings. She is abnormally sensitive to magnetic influences ;

when she passes a certain spot, she is attacked by headache; and it is implied that in the manner in which her being is at once absorbed in that of Eduard we have an example of the same mysterious agencies, for the attraction between Eduard and Ottilie at once declares itself. We are now in presence of the tragedy of the situation. But it develops in the most leisurely manner. The avocations of the party, indoors and out-of-doors, are described with a minuteness which is provoking to most readers, but in which Goethe himself evidently found either a relief or a direct pleasure. The immediate result of Ottilie's coming is that she and Eduard drift apart from Charlotte and the Captain, who, left to themselves, are also drawn to each other by the affinities. On one and the same day, curiously enough, both couples discover the relations in which they stand to each other. The occasion of the mutual confession of Eduard and Ottilie is one of the touches that characterize the book. Eduard had given her a manuscript to transcribe, and when she presented her copy to him he saw to his astonishment that, while the beginning was written in her own hand, the script gradually assimilated to his own, and the last page was an exact reproduction of it. "Ottilie, you love me," he exclaimed; and they understood each other. More on the lines of ordinary romance was the occasion of Charlotte and the Captain's explanation. While Eduard and Ottilie were having their interview, the two others were sailing on the lake adjoining the castle. The boat ran aground; the Captain carried Charlotte ashore, kissed her, and begged her forgiveness. The two scenes are brought together with the express intention of illustrating the different natures and different attitudes to life of Eduard and Ottilie, on the one hand, and of Charlotte and the Captain, on the other. In yielding to their emotions the former pair have no thought beyond the moment's rapture; while the latter, recognizing that they are face to face with a crisis



in their lives, come at once to the decision that the Captain must leave the Castle.

When Eduard hears of the intended departure of the Captain, he concludes that it is by arrangement with Charlotte, who is thus smoothing the way for their divorce. He finds he is mistaken, as she suggests that Ottilie should also leave the Castle, when they would be in a position to resume their former course of life. To this proposal Eduard will not consent, and, without intimating his intention, himself leaves the Castle. He does not go far, however, and is found by an intimate friend of the household, Mittler by name, who makes it the business of his life to patch up family quarrels. Eduard persuades Mittler to convey a message from him to Charlotte, proposing their divorce. To Mittler's delight Charlotte tells him she is about to become a mother, but the information has not the effect he expected on Eduard, who promptly decides to engage in military service.

A succession of chapters next describes the experiences of Charlotte and Ottilie during the absence of Eduard—an interruption in the narrative which does not contribute to its effectiveness. On the return of Eduard, however, all parties are brought face to face with the situation they have created for themselves, and the concluding chapters are suggestive of the sentimental drama. Taking up his residence at a place on his estate, Eduard summons the Captain (now a Major), and persuades him against his will to go to Charlotte and propose to her that she should consent to a divorce and marry the Major. While the Major is on this errand, Eduard encounters Ottilie with Charlotte's infant child by the side of the lake. He tells her the errand on which he has sent the Major but, when he is about to embrace her, she points to the child. Here we have another touch to remind us of the occult influences at work in human relations. From the child's birth everybody had recognized that it had the eyes of Ottilie



and the features of the Major, and with amazement Eduard sees the double resemblance.<sup>1</sup> As the result of the interview, Ottilie consents to marry him in the event of Charlotte's yielding to the Major's request. On their parting she enters a boat with the child, and in her agitation loses an oar. As she is trying to recover it, the child falls into the water, and though she succeeds in rescuing it, life is found to be extinct when she reaches the Castle. In the confusion created by this event the Major arrives with Eduard's request to Charlotte, who, with the remark that destiny will occasionally have its way, consents to the divorce, but refuses to commit herself regarding her future relations to the Major.

Ottilie, overwhelmed by the death of the child, for which she is responsible, is wakened to a sense of her misguided conduct and refuses to marry Eduard. It is arranged that she shall go to the school whence she had come, but on the way she meets Eduard who had been lying in wait for her. She persists in her refusal to marry him, and, somewhat inexplicably, they both return to the Castle. In what follows we are in the world of sentimental romance. All the four find themselves once more together and in the meshes of their destiny. Charlotte, always animated by higher motives than the others, consents to marry the Major, if Ottilie will marry Eduard, but on condition that the two men shall go abroad for a time. A mysterious letter, however, addressed by Ottilie to her friends, gives Eduard some hope that she will eventually consent to be his, and he resolves to remain at the Castle. Meantime Ottilie's conduct gives rise to anxious fears; she never opens her mouth, and at her request her food is taken to her own room. One evening the friend of the family, Mittler, during the course of a call, was enlarging on a favourite topic of his, the sanctity of the marriage-bond, when Ottilie entered the room. On taking in his words, she rushed to her own apartment, and

<sup>1</sup> This touch horrified Fritz Jacobi.

immediately her maid appeared and excitedly announced that her mistress was at the point of death. It is now discovered that she had for some time ceased to take food and that she is really dying. Seated on a couch, she calls for a box which contained certain mementoes of Eduard, and requests that it be placed under her feet. In this position she dies, her last words to Eduard being, "Promise me to live." The details that follow are entirely in the manner of the Romantics. The day following her death was Eduard's birthday, and she was arrayed in the festal dress she was to have worn on the occasion. The funeral rites were conducted after the Roman fashion, and we are told that miracles were wrought at her tomb. Eduard did not long survive her loss, and, with Charlotte's consent, he was buried by her side. "So," the tale concludes in words that come strangely from Goethe, who had openly boasted that he was of the creed of Lucretius, "so lie the lovers, sleeping side by side. Peace hovers over their resting-place. Fair angel-faces gaze down upon them from the vaulted ceiling, and what a happy moment that will be when one day they wake again together!"<sup>1</sup>

Goethe said of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that there was not a line in it which he had not himself felt, and he described it as a "burial-urn" in which he had deposited many sad experiences. Assuredly, in his treatment of its theme passages of his own life could not but recur to his memory and give it a poignant interest. He has himself described the struggle it cost him to tear himself away from Lotte Buff, the betrothed of Kestner—an experience of which *Werther* is the record. When Maximiliane von la Roche married Peter Brentano, "painful scenes" were occasioned by Goethe's visits to their home. Throughout his *liaison* with Frau von Stein he was in the same position with regard to her husband as

<sup>1</sup> This translation is that in Bohn's Standard Library, attributed to Mr. Froude.

the Captain with regard to Eduard. And he had had a more recent experience of the perils attending personal "affinities"; in 1806 he had married Christiane, and the year following he had been fascinated by Minna Herzlieb—with what results to his mental composure we have seen. We can readily believe him, therefore, when he told Zelter that much of his own experience was embodied in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

On its appearance it was subjected to the same charge as *Werther*—the charge of sapping the foundations of morality and of human responsibility. It was said of *Werther* that it was a specious justification of suicide; of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, that it discredited the sanctity of the marriage-bond. That there was some ground for the charge is shown by the fact that to the present day opinion is divided regarding its tendency, and it has always been regarded in Germany, we are told, as the most dangerous in its suggestions among all Goethe's works. In the case of at least two of the characters, Eduard and Otilie, we see exemplified the complete abdication of personal responsibility and an unresisting abandonment to passion.<sup>1</sup> Wholly absorbed in the emotions of the moment, they do not give a thought to the consequences of their actions for themselves or for others. Otilie, indeed, is awakened to a sense of her moral error, but it is only by the tragedy of the child's drowning and not by the spontaneous working of conscience. Even the conduct of Charlotte, who realizes social obligations and is not the slave of passion, leaves some hesitations on the mind of the reader; her reason for consenting to marry the Major is that destiny occasionally overrides the higher purposes of human lives. Moreover, the continual references to occult physical influences, as bearing on the conduct of all the leading characters, leaves us in some perplexity as to how far they really determine their respective fates. It is these

<sup>1</sup> Goethe disliked Eduard because he loved too "unconditionally."



impressions we receive from the book that give plausibility to the charge that it is a veiled attack on marriage. Yet we may be sure that no such intention was in Goethe's mind. True, in the past, both in his own life and in words that fell from him, he had given grounds for the imputation of the motive, but at the time when *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* was written he had the fixed conviction that on the sacredness of the marriage-bond depended the essential welfare of society; marriage, it was his final conviction, was "the beginning and the culmination of all civilization."<sup>1</sup> Be it said that Goethe was himself fully aware that the book was open to misconstruction; it was written, he told Knebel, only for such persons as would be likely to understand its real import. Yet it pained him when critics like his friend Jacobi denounced it as a moral outrage, and it came as a solace to him when a woman, Charlotte von Schiller, expressed her admiration and entire approval of the work as a whole.

There has been equal divergence of opinion regarding *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as a work of art. As originally conceived, it was to have been a short tale which was to find a place with the others that subsequently appeared in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Round the original conception, however, as so often happened with Goethe, especially in his later years, there grew up in his mind other interests which demanded a wider canvas for their adequate presentment. The nature of these accretions has been indicated in the outline of the story that has just been given; we have detailed accounts of plans for the beautifying of Eduard's estate, minute records of the family life, and abstract discussions on the most miscellaneous topics. Most singular of all the interpolations in the narrative are what profess to be extracts from a diary kept by Ottilie, which have been generally condemned as a strange aberration

<sup>1</sup> To Chancellor von Müller he called marriage a "victory for civilization," gained by Christianity, which should at no price be given up.



from all artistic propriety. In themselves these extracts are excrescences on the narrative, but to have assigned such profound reflections on life and its varied interests to a girl just escaped from school, strikingly illustrates how, with advancing years, the thinker in Goethe came to dominate the artist. We naturally recall *Werther* as also a tale of passion, and contrast it with the work of Goethe's ripest maturity. The difference between them is that in *Werther* Goethe is possessed by his subject, and that in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* he possesses it. *Werther* proceeded, as it were, from a single jet and the result is a whole fused in all its parts. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* there is no such complete fusion; for example, the landscapes in *Werther* are felt to be compact with the emotional experience of its leading character, while in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* they affect us as mere digressions from the narrative. So it is, remarks one of Goethe's latest German biographers, that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* "is one of those of Goethe's works, not few in number, which the majority even of his admirers have only read once." The uniform objectivity of treatment, too, is apt to leave the reader cold, and the lack of concentration in the narrative wearies him. Nor are the characters, with the exception of Otilie, of sufficient interest to compensate for the slow movement of the action; seen mainly under the domination of a single passion, we do not find in them the free play of life which we look for in living personalities. It is to the character of Otilie that Goethe has devoted his most searching analysis, and, such as she was, she is depicted with equal delicacy and subtlety. She is akin to Mignon in *Wilhelm Meister*, but her merely passive temperament does not waken the interest or create the charm of Mignon's iridescent being. The other characters in the romance, apart from the leading four, appear so intermittently and briefly that they pass out of our minds as the tale proceeds, and seem to be there only because they were necessary for its prolongation.

Devoid though the book is of the commoner qualities that attract in fiction, it contains two elements which further tend to repel the ordinary reader. The continual references to occult influences leave us with a feeling of something fantastic and unreal, of an abnormal world in which the drama is being enacted. Moreover, it has to be added—and this is, perhaps, the chief reason for the aversion with which the book is generally regarded—the situation it brings before us is in itself so painful that we can hardly have the desire to renew our acquaintance with it. Such are the impressions left on the minds of the majority of readers. Yet to take them as suggesting a final judgment would be manifestly unjust. It is the work of Goethe in his ripest time, and a work deeply felt and deeply meditated, which is to say that we look to find in it depths of thought and insight that mark it as coming from the hand of the master. It is with *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as with *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*: we read it not for the interest of the tale nor even for the special problems it raises, but for the helpfulness of its wisdom in the conduct of life.

Apart from its quality as a work of literature, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* possesses another interest. We have seen how susceptible Goethe was at every period of his life to the prevailing intellectual influences around him, and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is another illustration of this susceptibility. In conception and treatment it is directly inspired by the Romantic school. The very choice of its theme indicates Romantic influence, for marriage, which the school generally regarded as a cramping convention, was one of their favourite topics. It is a fate-drama, evidently influenced by the plays of the young Romantic, Zacharias Werner, whom we have seen associated with Goethe—plays which had found wide acceptance with the German public. The occultism in Goethe's work, also, is entirely in the vein of Romanticism. But most surprising of

all his concessions to the new school, as has been already said, is his adoption of a neo-Catholic drapery at the close. The neo-Catholicism of the Romantics was the part of their creed most detestable in Goethe's eyes ; yet here he is reproducing what he stigmatized as their pseudo-sentiment, and the natural result is to leave the reader with a sense of something forced and artificial as coming from Goethe's hand. In one important respect, however, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is distinguished from the work of the Romantics ; it is controlled by a spirit of sanity, the absence of which is a marked characteristic of the generality of their productions.

The work had a mingled reception on its appearance. Men like W. von Humboldt and Schelling,<sup>1</sup> who held free opinions on marriage, admired it ; and the Romantics hailed it with delight, both for its tendency and for its manifest imitation of their own methods. On the other hand, Fritz Jacobi was horror-stricken at its implications : " What entirely revolts me," he wrote, " is the apparent change of sensuality into spirituality at the conclusion ; one may say, the passage to Heaven of vile lust." Even Knebel and Wieland, neither of whom was squeamish in his views of the relations of the sexes, regarded the book as a mistake ; and generally its reception was such as to bring home to Goethe that he was out of sympathy with the majority of his countrymen. It was no new experience for him, as we know, yet it could not but intensify the sense of isolation which he had felt with increasing keenness since Schiller's death.

<sup>1</sup> Humboldt held that " marriage was no bond of souls " ; for Schelling it was a mere convention.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### GOETHE AND THE WAR OF LIBERATION—*DES EPIMENIDES ERWACHEN*

1810—1814

THE years 1810–14 were among the most depressing of Goethe's life, and there were special reasons for their being so. During these years his health was so precarious that it was a frequent cause of anxiety to his friends, and it was a bitter disappointment to him that the work on which he had expended more care and labour than on any other, his *Farbenlehre*, was on its publication (1810) chillingly received by the majority of contemporary men of science. Though by personal contact or correspondence he was in communication with many of the most distinguished men of the day, there was no one with whom he could hold intercourse on terms of intellectual equality, sure of a sympathetic response. Moreover, the character of the time isolated him not only from elect individuals but also from his nation in general. He was just as much out of sympathy with the prevailing tendencies in politics and literature. In politics the period saw the German people rise against the French invader in their War of Liberation, drive him from their territory, and achieve their emancipation from a foreign yoke. But Goethe regarded this triumphant national effort with coldness and suspicion, as he saw in its result no certain prospect of a settled state which would ensure the quiet development of the best elements in the nation. The prevailing tendencies in literature



were no less repugnant to him. With growing indignation he watched Romanticism conquering the public taste and thus undoing all the work that had been accomplished by Schiller and himself in their endeavour to restore Greek ideals.<sup>1</sup> References by himself and others to his mental condition during these years are a remarkable commentary on the current conception of him as one superior to all the weaknesses that worry the lives of ordinary mortals. From Jena he thus wrote to the widow of Schiller: "I find it most necessary to shake off certain hypochondriacal influences. Just imagine that for some time I have enjoyed nothing better than writing poems that are not fit to read aloud. Looked at properly, this is a pathological condition which should be got rid of the sooner the better."<sup>2</sup>

Goethe's manner of life during the period now before us was that of the years immediately preceding. The greater part of his time he spent in Weimar, busy with his own literary and scientific pursuits, actively interested in the theatre, receiving and paying visits, and occasionally attending the Court. When spring came, he set out on his travels, mainly on account of his health but partly, also, for pleasure and instruction. These prolonged absences from Weimar, however, were not seasons of idleness; on the contrary, it was at such places as Jena and Carlsbad that he was freest to execute his various tasks.

Goethe calls the year 1810 one of the important years of his life, and he had occasion to remember it specially, as it witnessed his relief from a heavy burden which he had borne for twenty years. During the first months of 1810 he saw through the press his *Farbenlehre*, the work which he considered the greatest achievement of his life, deliberately placing

<sup>1</sup> Driving one day in his coach with a companion, he denounced the Romantics in such loud and violent tones that the coachman turned round to look at him.

<sup>2</sup> April 27, 1810. About the same time Frau von Stein wrote: "I fear that our friend is becoming a hypochondriac."

it above *Faust* as a product of his genius. It appeared at the end of May in two volumes, consisting of three parts, didactic, polemic and historical. We have seen under what circumstances the work originated.<sup>1</sup> A hasty experiment made in May, 1791, convinced him that the Newtonian theory of light was founded on an initial error, and thenceforward the subject had engrossed his thoughts and entailed an amount of toil beyond every other. At home and on his travels it was ever present to his mind, and, if he could get a sympathetic and intelligent hearer, there was no theme on which he would more eagerly enlarge; in Schiller he had found such a listener, and in their correspondence his optical experiments fill a considerable space. He had been prepared, he tells us, for a cool reception of the work, but not for the complete lack of sympathy which it actually met with. From its first appearance, indeed, specialists almost with one accord rejected its explanation of the nature of light and continued to regard Goethe as *un hardi ignorant*. Far from being convinced of his error, however, he believed to the end that his treatment by the men of science was only another illustration of the blind bigotry which had always characterized them as a class. That he was embittered and depressed by the reception of the work to which he had for so many years given his whole heart and mind, his own frequent utterances prove; to the close of his life he expressed himself against Newton and Newtonians in terms that would startle us did we not remember the violence of rage of which he was always capable. There is both a pathos and an irony in the fact that a mind like Goethe's should have given the best years of his life to the pursuit of an illusion; yet if the main thesis of the *Farbenlehre* is mistaken, the work remains an extraordinary memorial of his capacity for toil and of the range of his powers. And the historical part of the book will always retain an interest for philosophical readers.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 408.

As has already been remarked, we have here Goethe as an intellectual equal judging the thinkers of the past who have made the greatest contributions to human progress.

On May 16, "the day of his emancipation,"<sup>1</sup> as he calls it, Goethe set out for his customary sojourn in Bohemia. For nearly five months he was on his travels, spending the time successively in Jena, Carlsbad, Teplitz, Dresden and Freiburg. Two personal acquaintanceships which he made on his travels he specially valued. In Carlsbad he met the young and newly-married Empress of Austria, to whose personal charm and accomplishments he pays a deserved tribute, and by whose gracious condescension to himself he was thoroughly captivated.<sup>2</sup> He was to meet her twice again, and she was to remain in his memory as one of the delightful visions that had crossed his path. The other acquaintanceship was also with an exalted personage, namely, Louis, King of Holland, Napoleon's brother, with whom he shared the same boarding-house in Teplitz. He had met the great Napoleon two years before, and the contrast between the characters of the two could not but impress him. In Louis he found one of the finest of souls, at once profoundly spiritual and profoundly human, and he has depicted him in one of those subtle character-sketches in which he is perhaps unsurpassed.

In the beginning of October Goethe was back in Weimar, and a few weeks later he undertook a task which was to engage him for the next five months. In following the life of Goethe we are struck by the fact that he not infrequently expended a measure of toil on subjects which were hardly worthy of it. Such was the work which now occupied him. We have seen how, when in Italy, he had made the acquaintance of the artist Philipp Hackert, to whose

<sup>1</sup> From the *Farbenlehre*.

<sup>2</sup> At the request of the citizens of Carlsbad Goethe addressed three poems to her.



instruction in landscape painting he acknowledged a special debt. Hackert died in 1808, and left materials for an autobiography which in his will he desired to be put into Goethe's hands to be prepared for publication. Goethe had a high regard for Hackert's personal character, which had been tried under peculiarly difficult conditions, and he esteemed him as an artist with an individuality of his own. As it was, however, the life of Hackert, which Goethe gave to the world from the materials supplied to him, is out of all proportion to the importance of its subject, and is virtually negligible. Since, however, Goethe tells us that the preparation of Hackert's autobiography suggested the writing of his own, which he actually began while engaged on Hackert's,<sup>1</sup> even this labour was not without fruitful result.

In May, 1811, Goethe saw much of a visitor who had come to him on a special mission, Sulpiz Boisserée, one of two brothers who had inherited a prosperous mercantile business in Cologne. Both brothers were Roman Catholics, and both, especially Sulpiz, were enthusiastic students of Gothic art. With abundant means at their disposal they had obtained numerous engravings of Cologne Cathedral with the object of creating a general interest in the mediæval art of Germany and the Low Countries. It was their ambition to enlist Goethe's sympathies in their task, as his support would go far to ensure its success. Sulpiz had procured an introduction to Goethe from Count Reinhard, and he had come to Weimar with the express intention of showing him his treasures. From his own account of their successive interviews, Goethe's first reception of him was not encouraging; the enthusiasm for mediæval art seemed to the poet only another manifestation of that Romanticism which was disastrously misleading the public taste. In their successive meetings, however, Boisserée flattered himself that Goethe gradually became

<sup>1</sup> He began it on January 29, 1811, and worked at it so continuously that he completed three volumes in three successive years.



interested in the illustrations of the Gothic which he had shown him, and he left him under the impression that he had made him a partial convert. As will afterwards appear, he had succeeded in impressing on Goethe that there were excellences in mediæval art which he had not hitherto sufficiently appreciated, though to the end it was the art of Greece that he regarded as the supreme ideal after which humanity should continue to aspire.<sup>1</sup>

Boisserée left Weimar on May 11, and on the same day Goethe started for his usual summer quarters at Carlsbad, accompanied on this occasion by Christiane. His travels were not extensive this year, as, after about six weeks' stay in Carlsbad, mainly devoted to his Autobiography, he returned to Weimar. Writing on July 14, Frau Schiller gives this account of his state of mind at that time. "He is not at peace with the world, it seems, and he says that he would like to become an Indian hermit." One unpleasant experience, which touched his deepest thoughts and feelings, he has himself specially emphasized. From his friend Fritz Jacobi he received a presentation copy of a book, entitled *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung*, of which the main thesis is that Nature conceals God. In Goethe's view this was rank impiety; for him, as he expressed it to Knebel, "mind and matter, soul and body, thought and extension, or (as a recent French writer clearly puts it) will and motion were, are, and always will be the necessary double ingredients of the universe." To Jacobi himself he frankly stated how repellent was his conception of nature, and in a letter to Jacobi in this connection there occurs one of Goethe's most familiar utterances. "For my part," he wrote, "in view of the manifold sides of my nature, I cannot find satisfaction in one mode of thinking; as poet and artist, I am a polytheist; as a man of science, on the other hand, I

<sup>1</sup> Boisserée proposed to revisit Weimar in the following autumn, but it is significant that Goethe put him off.

am a pantheist ; and I am the one just as decidedly as I am the other. If, as an ordinary human being, I need a God for my personality, that, too, is provided for. Heaven and earth form a kingdom so wide that its mere comprehension needs the organs of all existences working together.”<sup>1</sup> Irritated and depressed by Jacobi’s book, Goethe betook himself to what he calls his “ old refuge ” ; for weeks, he says, Spinoza’s *Ethic* was his stay and comfort.<sup>2</sup>

The great world-event of 1812 was Napoleon’s invasion of Russia which, though it did not interrupt the usual tenor of Goethe’s life, deeply depressed him. As the result of Napoleon’s marriage with Marie Louise, the daughter of the Emperor of Austria, in 1810, he had hoped for a permanent European peace, indifferent whether or not it was secured at the expense of German unity. The greater part of the year he spent away from Weimar, mainly at Carlsbad and Teplitz, diligently continuing his Autobiography. In Carlsbad he met the Emperor of Austria and his daughter, the French Empress, but apparently they held themselves aloof from him. It was otherwise with the Austrian Empress whom he again met at Teplitz, and found, as he told Christiane, more charming and gracious than ever. At Teplitz, and subsequently at Carlsbad also, he had Beethoven as a fellow-visitor. They had previously had communications with each other, and Beethoven had expressed his reverent admiration of Goethe’s genius, which he had testified to by setting *Egmont* to music. But their intercourse proved that their natures were incompatible. In a letter to Bettina von Arnim, Beethoven relates the well-known incident in which he implies that he showed to advantage in comparison with Goethe. Walking together one day at Teplitz, they met the Empress and her suite. Goethe, on their approach, stood aside and made a

<sup>1</sup> January 6, 1813.

<sup>2</sup> About the same time he re-read the *Vicar of Wakefield* with “ innocent pleasure.”

courtly obeisance, but Beethoven walked through the crowd, at the same time pressing down his hat and buttoning his great coat. They never met again, though Beethoven continued to retain his admiration and good feeling for Goethe till 1813, when Goethe's failure to answer a letter from him permanently alienated them.<sup>1</sup>

In September Goethe was back in Weimar, and he spent the remainder of the year partly there and partly in Jena. October, November and December saw Napoleon's disastrous retreat from Russia, and Goethe noted in his Diary its successive incidents. "That Moscow is burnt does not matter to me," he wrote to Reinhard, but, as the context shows, the words were written not in callousness but in a mood of hopelessness regarding the world's future.<sup>2</sup> It must have gratified him, however, that his demigod Napoleon, in his flight from Russia, made inquiries after him as he passed through Weimar, and sent a direct greeting to him from Erfurt. But Goethe's settled mood, as the year closed, was such as to give concern to his friends. "Our only comfort, our honoured friend and master," wrote Luise Siedler, a young artist in whom he was specially interested, "is now always in such a weak state of health and so cast down by the general course of events, that my last stay with him made me as often anxious and distressed as happy."<sup>3</sup>

Gloomier still for Goethe were the events of the following year (1813), and they touched his own personal life more directly. It was the year of Germany's second and triumphant effort to free herself from French domination, a result which did not fill Goethe with the sanguine hopes entertained by the majority of his countrymen. The year began

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Zelter Goethe speaks of Beethoven's "ganz ungebändigter Persönlichkeit."

<sup>2</sup> In his poem, *Der Winter und Timur*, in the *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe has given a wonderful description of Napoleon's Russian campaign.

<sup>3</sup> At this time Goethe devoted his leisure to the writings of Giordano Bruno, but found it impossible to separate the gold from the dross in them.



for him with a severe personal loss ; on January 20, Wieland died. There had never been the closest of intellectual bonds between them, nor even the warmest relations of friendship. The lack of intellectual seriousness which Goethe early noted in Wieland, made impossible between them the deeper communings of mind with mind or heart with heart. Yet, with occasional brief misunderstandings, they had been much to each other. On Goethe's first arrival in Weimar, Wieland had received him with enthusiasm, and he had stood by him in those early years when his association with the Duke gave occasion to unfounded scandal. After Goethe's return from Italy with his changed ideals in art and literature, their intercourse had been less close, but there had been no diminution of good feeling between them. Writing to W. von Humboldt a few weeks after Wieland's death, he has this reference, and the opening sentence betrays his own mood at the time when he wrote it : " Blessed in the deepest sense is now our Wieland ; he has fallen asleep in his Lord, and, without special suffering, has passed to his gods and his heroes. *Utile nobis proposuit exemplar*, what may be achieved by intellect and material gifts, study, knowledge of human nature, sensibility, versatility, when conjoined with diligence and persistence. If every one would make such good use of his gifts and his time, what miracles would happen ! "

Hostilities began in spring and occupied two distinct campaigns. In the first, which was ended on June 4 by the armistice of Poischwitz, Napoleon had only to fight the Russians and Prussians, whom he defeated at Lützen and Bautzen. When the war opened, the French were in possession of Weimar, but in April the garrison was captured by a combined body of Russians and Prussians. On the 17th, shortly before the attack, Goethe had left the town, taking with him some of his most valuable possessions and burying others. His destination was Teplitz, which was for the time out of the war zone, but on the



way he spent a few days at Dresden, which was now swarming with Russian and Prussian soldiery and where he saw the entry of the King of Prussia and the Czar of Russia. With what eyes he beheld the uprising against the might of Napoleon is told by the leading patriotic singer of the War of Liberation, Moritz Arndt, who met him at the house of his old friend Körner, and who describes him as of the same stately beauty as when he saw him twenty years before, but in a condition of mind that did not gladden his friends. "He was much depressed, and he had neither hope nor joy in the changed aspect of affairs." When Körner and his son spoke enthusiastically of the hope of Germany's liberation, he burst forth: "Shake your chains. The man is too great for you. You will not break them." <sup>1</sup>

After six days spent at Dresden, Goethe proceeded to Teplitz, where he remained for three months, mainly engaged on his Autobiography. On August 10 he returned to Dresden, where a different scene awaited him.<sup>2</sup> The second campaign opened in August, when Napoleon had to fight Austria, Russia, and Prussia combined, and Goethe found Dresden occupied by the French. While there, he witnessed a spectacle which must have confirmed him in his doubts as to the possibility of a united Germany. Three months earlier he had seen the citizens of Dresden hail with acclamation the entry of the Czar of Russia and the King of Prussia into their city; now he saw the birthday of Napoleon celebrated by a general illumination and a procession of the city maidens, all clad in white in honour of the occasion.

On August 19, he was back in Weimar, whence, a week later, he went in company with the Duke to

<sup>1</sup> Later in the same year (August) Goethe bet a gold ducat that the war would not be transferred to the left bank of the Rhine. He lost his ducat and paid it.

<sup>2</sup> The armistice ended at midnight, August 10-11.

the village of Ilmenau in the Thuringian Forest. All his life he had sought refreshment and repose in the solitude of Ilmenau, and at this moment, when the world around him seemed to be in a welter of hopeless and meaningless strife, its seclusion was specially restorative. From the letters he wrote to Christiane from Ilmenau we gather that the week he spent there was an interlude of such lightness of heart as had long been infrequent with him. About this time, too, his relations to Christiane seem to have assumed a special tenderness. As he regarded their connection, this year was the semi-jubilee of their union, and the thought recalled all that she had been to him. "It was sound advice," he wrote to her, "that directed me to Ilmenau. That I was in good spirits on the way here, you saw from the verses I sent you. Yesterday I was six hours on horseback, which agreed very well with me." The verses he sent to Christiane were the lines entitled *Gefunden*, in which, with all the lightness and grace of his youthful lyrics, he has idealized their relations in the form of a parable of the flower which he transplanted from the forest to his garden.

When Goethe returned to Weimar in the last week of August, the war was still raging and the world was awaiting its issue. He has himself told us how he spent the time of anxious suspense. In times of public commotion Plato says that it is the part of the wise man "to stand aside under a wall." As we know, this was also Goethe's opinion, and he had a method of his own for escaping from the turmoil around him. It was to turn his thoughts to a region as far remote as possible from the distractions that beset him, and on this occasion he found his escape in the study of Chinese literature and history.

The crisis of the war came in October. On the 4th of that month French troops marched past and through Weimar, and on the 18th Napoleon was routed at the battle of Leipzig—the beginning of the

end of his career.<sup>1</sup> During the two days that followed the battle, Goethe wrote to a correspondent, Weimar experienced every degree of horror. Both within the town and outside it fighting took place between the fleeing French and the pursuing Allies. For a time it became a hospital for the wounded soldiery, and Goethe himself had to suffer from the quartering of officers. He was relieved from his troubles, however, by "the presence and special favour" of Metternich, who was in Weimar in the last days of October, and showed Goethe marked attention. "It is certainly uplifting both for mind and heart," he declares, "to be given an insight into the views of such men as he, who direct that stupendous whole, by the smallest fraction of which the rest of us feel ourselves oppressed or, rather, overwhelmed."<sup>2</sup>

Later in the year Goethe had to face a disagreeable experience. In November the Duke announced his intention of raising a company of volunteers, and Goethe's son, August, was desirous of offering his services. The action which Goethe took is a significant comment on his attitude to the War of Liberation. On the plea that he was then without a secretary, he begged the Duke to exempt August, as being indispensable to him.<sup>3</sup> The Duke granted his request, but there was general indignation in Weimar at Goethe's proceeding. But, in truth, he made no concealment of his lack of sympathy with the national movement. About the same date there was an evening party at Frau Schopenhauer's, and Goethe was one of the guests. The Romantic, de la Motte Fouqué, was of the company, and it is he who

<sup>1</sup> While the battle was proceeding, Goethe wrote the couplet—

Der Mensch erfährt, er sei auch, wer er mag,  
Ein letztes Glück und einen letzten Tag.

<sup>2</sup> Among other distinguished persons in Weimar at this time were von Hardenberg and A. von Humboldt.

<sup>3</sup> Riemer had left him in 1812, and his successor had broken down in health.



relates the incident. In the course of the evening Fouqué recited two stanzas giving expression to the national aspirations, and, while all the rest of the company warmly applauded, Goethe alone gave no sign of approval.

Goethe, however, was to have a formal opportunity of publicly making known to his countrymen how he regarded their effort to achieve their national liberation. The result of the battle of Leipzig was the expulsion of the French from Germany, and in the opening months of the ensuing year (1815) the invasion of France by the Allies and the abdication of Napoleon followed (April 11). In May Goethe went to Berka, a small watering-place on the Ilm, and while there he received from Iffland, now Director-General of the Royal Theatre in Berlin, a request which he must have regarded with mingled feelings. Festivities, Iffland wrote, were in course of preparation for the reception of the allied sovereigns on their return to Berlin. Would Goethe write some kind of theatrical piece which would serve as a general introduction? The appeal was flattering, as it implied that the nation looked to him as the representative spokesman of its aspirations, but he at first refused on the ground that he had another theatrical piece in hand, and that a month (the time within which Iffland desired his contribution) was insufficient for the production of a satisfactory work. A few days later he changed his mind and wrote to Iffland that an idea had occurred to him which, if successfully developed, he thought would be worthy of the occasion. At the same time he thanked him for giving him the opportunity of expressing to the German nation how he had felt and sympathized with its joys and sorrows.

We have seen how little Goethe was entitled to be the voice of the German nation in the struggle through which it had passed. He had not shared the national feelings regarding the French domination; and he had been quite prepared to accept it,



if it ensured a stable government and permanent peace. And, in point of fact, he believed that the people had been better governed under the Confederation of the Rhine than under previous conditions. Neither did he share the national hopes of a united Germany, for it was his fixed conviction that the German people were naturally incapable of united effort in any cause. "To hold themselves apart from each other," he wrote to Knebel, "is the peculiarity of the Germans; I have never seen them united except in hatred of Napoleon. We shall see what they will do when he is driven across the Rhine."<sup>1</sup> When the uprising took place, therefore, he was convinced that it was in any event a mistake. Should it prove unsuccessful, as he confidently expected, the second state of Germany under the French would be worse than the first. On the other hand, should Napoleon be vanquished, there was every reason to dread a blacker future for the nation. Prussia had played the leading part in the revolt against him, and in all likelihood Prussia would attain ascendancy over the other German states and impose its methods and ideals universally. Such a contingency Goethe regarded with dismay. From his youth Prussia and all its ways had been repellent to him. In Berlin his work had been consistently disparaged; the great Frederick had mocked at his *Götz von Berlichingen*, and the Berlin publisher Nicolai, the representative of obscurantism in literature and philosophy, had made it his express object to discredit him with the German public. We have seen that the one visit which Goethe paid to the city (1778) had intensified his dislike of the Prussian character and Prussian methods, and that in his satirical play *Die Vögel* he had ridiculed Frederick's rule, and spoken of the Black Eagle as fitly typifying Prussian arrogance and truculence. In recent years, too, he had had personal experience of the Prussian

<sup>1</sup> Other distinguished persons, such as Hardenberg and Metternich, considered a united Germany to be a fond imagination.

military officer, and he saw in him a type which revolted his deepest instincts.<sup>1</sup> Such being his conception of Prussia and her characteristics, the prospect of her ascendancy in Germany could not inspire him with sanguine hopes of a future condition of things favourable to the ideals which he himself cherished. And Prussia's two allies, Russia and Austria, he also regarded with suspicion and apprehension, as he was convinced that it was in the line of their policy to make use of Germany in their own interests. It will be seen, therefore, that when he undertook to produce a congratulatory *Festspiel* on the return of the three potentates after their triumph over Napoleon, he was not likely to be deeply inspired.

Regarded as the expression of a nation's triumph and a nation's hopes, *Des Epimenides Erwachen* is certainly a singular performance. It is a piece of pure symbolism throughout, and its shadowy figures, no less than the generalities they utter, remove it from the sphere of human feeling. According to the Greek myth, Epimenides was plunged in a deep sleep by the gods, and when he awoke after forty years he was regarded by the surrounding peoples as endowed with heavenly wisdom. When he appears in Goethe's play, he has awakened from his slumber, but is put to sleep again by genii that he may escape coming calamities and attain to knowledge of the future. During his sleep the stupendous events that ensued are brought before the audience by a succession of tableaux suggestive of the titanic conflict, and by symbolical figures representing the interests and passions that were distracting the world. We have an army, clad in the dresses of different peoples, on the march against the enemy, and returning triumphant from its campaign; the Demon of War, Demons of Craft, and the Demon of Oppression; Faith, Love, Hope, Unity, and other beings typifying the various

<sup>1</sup> When the King and Queen of Prussia were in Weimar, they paid no attention to Goethe. This was unusual in the case of exalted persons who visited the Duke.

emotions evoked by the issues at stake. The whole is to be understood as a symbolical representation of the War of Liberation and the victory of the Allies, and of the hopes inspired by that victory. According to Goethe himself, the axis of the piece turns on the success of the Demon of Oppression in befooling and enslaving Love and Faith, by which he meant to imply that the widespread acceptance of the doctrines of the French Revolution by the German people was responsible for all they had suffered. The Demon, however, had not been able to subdue Hope, and by Hope the nation was saved. When at the close of the piece Epimenides awakes, it is to find himself amid the ruins of the palace <sup>1</sup> in which he had fallen asleep, but he is soon consoled by the fact that its reconstruction has already begun. In conclusion the Chorus addresses the German nation in words of congratulation but also of warning which are the sincere expression of Goethe's own feeling.

So rissen wir uns rings herum  
Von fremden Banden los.  
Nun sind wir Deutsche wiederum,  
Nun sind wir wieder gross.  
So waren wir und sind es auch  
Das edelste Geschlecht,  
Von biederm Sinn und reinem Hauch  
Und in der Thaten Recht !

Such was the work which Goethe presented to his countrymen as an expression of all the travail they had undergone during the French domination and the War of Liberation. From the first it has been regarded as unworthy of his genius and of the occasion. The Berliners, who saw its original representation, marvelled what it all meant,<sup>2</sup> and when it was afterwards produced in Weimar it was received with emphatic disapproval. Subsequent criticism has confirmed the contemporary judgment,

<sup>1</sup> The palace is to be regarded as typifying Europe before the French Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> It was first played in Berlin on March 30, 1815.



and has, moreover, raised a curious question. Whom are we to understand as typified by Epimenides? By some critics he is identified with the German people; by others with Goethe himself. It is difficult to suppose that Goethe deliberately put on the sheet of repentance before the German public, and openly confessed that he, like Epimenides, had been asleep throughout his nation's agony. Yet from the point of view of the general opinion of the time, the words which Epimenides utters on his awakening would have been sufficiently appropriate in the mouth of Goethe himself.

Doch schäm' ich mich der Ruhestunden;  
Mit euch zu leiden, war Gewinn:  
Denn für den Schmerz, den ihr empfunden,  
Seid ihr auch grösser als ich bin.

As a matter of fact, however, we know that Goethe, so far from feeling any self-reproach for the line of conduct he had chosen to pursue, was perfectly convinced that it was the line most profitable at once for himself and for the world. That he was deeply concerned for the future well-being of his people his own frequent expressions and the testimony of others conclusively prove. But his conceptions of how that well-being was to be secured differed from those of the majority of his contemporaries. In one of the most noteworthy of his reported conversations belonging to this time<sup>1</sup> (December, 1813) he expressed in passionate terms his own patriotic aspirations and expounded the conditions under which they could be realized. "It only remains for each of us," he said, "according to his talent, his inclination and his position to deepen and widen the culture of our people . . . in order that they may not fall behind the peoples of other countries." How he himself had sought to forward this end he has thus stated to a correspondent. "To be frank, the greatest service which I believe I can do to my

<sup>1</sup> With the historian H. Luden.



country, is to persevere in my biographical attempt to set forth fairly and calmly the changes in moral, æsthetic, and philosophical culture in so far as I have been a witness of them, and to show how one generation invariably sought to supplant and subvert its predecessor instead of being grateful to it for stimulus, information, and tradition."

The "biographical attempt" to which Goethe refers in the above passage was *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, which had almost exclusively engaged him since 1810, and the third volume of which was published in 1814.<sup>1</sup> The period before us (1810-1814), however, was more prolific in short poems than the five years following the death of Schiller. During these five years, as we have seen, only about half a dozen such poems came from his hand, whereas he threw off about thirty between 1810 and 1814. The latter, however, are not comparable in quality to those produced during the period of his comradeship with Schiller. What specially strikes us in them is that they contain little or nothing to remind us of the momentous experience through which the German nation was then passing. War songs we do not expect from Goethe, but we might have looked for some reflective poems prompted and inspired by the spectacle which Europe then presented. For the most part the themes which he chose were trivial, and the prevailing mood in which he treats them is disengaged banter. To these years belong *Ergo bibamus!* (1810), a call to the careless enjoyment of life; *Die Lustigen von Weimar* (1813), a rhyming record of a week's round of amusements in Weimar; the humorous ballads, *Der treue Eckhart*, *Die wandelnde Glocke*, and *Der Todtentanz*, which handles the theme of *Tam o' Shanter*, though in another fashion and with less dramatic effect. A few short satirical pieces are directed against his pet aversions: *Katzenpastete* is not a very seemly skit on Newton and mathematicians in general; the Romantics are

<sup>1</sup> The last volume was published after Goethe's death.

ridiculed in *Den Zudringlichen* and *Pfaffenspiel*, in which they are likened to Protestant children mimicking Roman Catholic ceremonies ; and the futilities of metaphysical speculation are mocked in *Die Weisen und die Leute*,<sup>1</sup> where the people are represented as consulting the sages of antiquity on the mysteries of existence, and receiving their various solutions. But perhaps the most remarkable short poem of the period is that entitled, *Gross ist die Diana der Ephesier* (1811), in which Goethe gives direct expression to his pagan sympathies.<sup>2</sup> A goldsmith of Ephesus, who has devoted his art to the worship of Diana, sitting in his workshop, hears the sound of a tumult in the streets. It is occasioned by the incident recorded in the Acts of the Apostles—the rising of the craft of silversmiths against Paul and his fellow-evangelists, Gaius and Aristarchus. The goldsmith permits his apprentice to join the crowd, but himself quietly continues his work at the image of the goddess on which he is engaged and which he hopes may prove worthy of her divinity. Goethe's comment on the goldsmith's action is in the concluding lines of the poem :

Will's aber einer anders halten,  
So mag er nach Belieben schalten ;  
Nur soll er nicht das Handwerk schänden ;  
Sonst wird er schlecht und schmäählich enden.

Enough has been said of the nature and content of the shorter pieces produced by Goethe during this period to show that they came of no pressing and continuous inspiration. He was on the eve, however, of a fresh emotional experience that was to find expression in a succession of poems which open a new vein in his prolific genius.

<sup>1</sup> Goethe called it *Gastmahl der Weisen*.

<sup>2</sup> The poem was written as a protest against Fritz Jacobi's book above mentioned—*Von göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung*.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### *WEST-ÖSTLICHER DIVAN*

1814—1818

GOETHE'S experience during 1814-18 affords an interesting illustration of the mysterious workings of genius. The years immediately preceding had been years of depression and comparative unproductiveness; the five that were to follow were to be years of resilience and notable fecundity. He himself remarks that it is the privilege of genius to enjoy a second puberty, and he doubtless had this period of his life in his mind when he said so.

There were special causes that explain Goethe's temporary rejuvenescence of spirit and productive activity. External conditions were more favourable to the free exercise of his powers than they had been during the years he had just left behind. The War of Liberation was over, and after more than twenty years the nations of Europe were at peace with one another. He had, indeed, little sympathy with the political developments in Germany that followed the War of Liberation, but there was at least peace in the land, and it was easier for him to pursue his labours, now undistracted by war's alarms. But there was a direct and special cause for his renewed zest in life and quickened inspiration; in 1814 he had found a fresh source of emotional and intellectual interest which was to preoccupy and inspire him continuously during the following five years.

We have seen how it was his habit to seek relief from a present disturbing experience in some new living interest. During the War of Liberation he

had found refuge in the study of Chinese literature and history, and he now found a similiar refuge, more abiding and more rewarding—also in the East. The East had, indeed, a natural attraction for Goethe. One of the books that had a special charm for him in his boyhood was the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, to which, as he tells us, he owed “almost all his moral education.” In his early youth his intercourse with Herder, who was the first to reveal Hebrew poetry as literature, deepened this interest. During the opening years of the nineteenth century special attention had been drawn to Oriental things, both by public events and by various publications dealing with them. In 1808 Friedrich Schlegel had issued his book on the languages and wisdom of India, which Goethe read with enjoyment, though he detected in its treatment of the subject a propaganda of his enemy, neo-Catholicism. It was from another work that he received the direct impulse that was to result in a remarkable addition to the long tale of his poetical achievements. Von Hammer’s translation of the *Divan* (collection of poems) of the Persian poet Hafiz, appeared in 1812–13, and in the first half of 1814 Goethe read it. In Hafiz he found a kindred spirit, and the idea seized him that he also would produce a *Divan*, into which he could pour, in Oriental guise, at once the passing experience of the moment and his permanent convictions on the deepest questions of life. Thus, in his own words, he had found a “vessel” admirably adapted to be the deposit of thought and emotion, expressed in a manner becoming his time of life and his actual surroundings. The *West-östlicher Divan*, as he eventually entitled it, is to be regarded as a kind of poetical diary of the years 1814–18; during all this period the writing of the poems themselves, and the study of Oriental things that bore on the character which it was his intention to give them, were his main preoccupation.



We left him at the little watering-place, Berka, where he spent the May and June of 1814. The cold baths of Berka did not prove efficacious in removing the various complaints from which he suffered, and he found it necessary to try another place of cure. He had lost faith in Carlsbad, and he suggested to his physicians that the hot springs of Wiesbaden might prove beneficial. There were other inducements that drew him to the Rhine and Main country; the Rhine he had not seen for twenty-two years, and it was seventeen years since he had been in Frankfort. Moreover, he had a pressing invitation from the Boisserées to visit them at Heidelberg, and examine their collection of engravings of German mediæval art.

On June 25, attended by a servant, Goethe travelled in his carriage from Weimar to Frankfort, a journey which occupied him four days. It was accomplished in a lightness of spirits which had been long unfamiliar to him, and which found expression in several short poems, subsequently to find a place in the *Divan*. He remained only one night in Frankfort, and spent it in revisiting old scenes, in which after the lapse of seventeen years he found much changed for better and for worse. Passing his paternal home, he heard the familiar tones of the old house-clock, which the present occupier had bought at an auction and placed in its former position. On the evening of the next day he proceeded to Wiesbaden.

The expedition extended to four months, and many circumstances combined to make it an unalloyed pleasure. A delightful climate and a glorious country, treasures of art and interesting antiquities, pleasant and profitable social intercourse, and (what was always agreeable to Goethe) deferential respect from the various distinguished persons he met, gave him a succession of exhilarating experiences which his rapidly improving health enabled him to enjoy to the full. With the exception of brief

visits to friends, he remained till September 12 in Wiesbaden, where during the first weeks of his stay he had the companionship of Zelter, of all his friends the one to whom he could unbosom himself most freely. The cure of his physical ailments had been the chief object of his journey, but, as in all his journeys, intellectual profit was for Goethe an indispensable necessity for full enjoyment. As had been his invariable habit, he drew from the distinguished persons he now met such special information as they could give on the subjects in which they were authorities. All objects of interest in science and art he curiously inquired after and carefully examined, recording his impressions methodically. The collection of old Dutch and German masters got together by the Boisserées was at the elder brother's house in Heidelberg. Thither he went on September 24, and spent a delightful fortnight in examining it, and in converse with the two brothers and with other acquaintances of kindred tastes. The Boisserées had reason to be satisfied with his appreciation of their treasures, which were, indeed, a revelation to him, as Sulpiz states that hitherto he had never seen a van Eyck, and had been acquainted only with the works of Lucas Cranach and with a few of Dürer. During his stay he often remained from 8 o'clock till mid-day, alone with the pictures, each of which had to be taken down from the wall and placed on an easel for his closer scrutiny. He warmly expressed his admiration of what he saw, and frankly acknowledged that he had hitherto undervalued the merits of the old Dutch and German masters. But the Boisserées were mistaken when they imagined that he was disposed to place mediæval art on a level with the art of the Greeks. As it happened, on his way to Frankfort from Heidelberg he passed through Darmstadt, in whose galleries he saw some specimens of Greek art, and after his journey, recalling his various impressions, he wrote these

words to Knebel (November 9, 1814): "I have supped my fill both at the Homeric and the Nibelungen tables, but for myself I have found nothing to suit me better than broad, deep, ever-living nature, the works of the Greek poets and sculptors."

Throughout his journey the *Divan* had been uppermost in Goethe's mind; there were days when he wrote as many as ten or more poems which afterwards found a place in it. He had hardly required a fresh inspiration to continue a labour which was of selfsprung enjoyment; but a new impulse was to enrich the completed whole with material peculiarly consonant to the Oriental world into which he had chosen to transport himself. Once more a woman was to evoke in him emotions which had to find relief in song. Among the persons he met during his travels was Johann Jacob Willemer, a banker in Frankfort. Willemer had been a friend of Goethe's mother and had long been a friend of his own. He was one of the leading men in the city, a Privy Councillor and a Director of the Theatre. Of cultivated mind and of many interests, he understood and appreciated what Goethe had been and was to his country. He was now a widower of fifty-four, and his household consisted of his two daughters (one a widow) and a third inmate who had had a history. She was Marianne Jung, originally an opera-dancer whom, fourteen years before, Willemer had taken from the stage and made a member of his household. Of all the women with whom Goethe came into close contact she seems to have been the most remarkable. The portrait we have of her suggests character and talent rather than beauty, and her own writings and the testimony of those who knew her support the inference. From her resolute will she was known among her friends as "the little Blücher"; and those of her letters which have been preserved display the insight and range of thought of a powerful



mind. Moreover, she possessed a genuine poetic gift, and her intercourse with Goethe was to elicit its highest expression. To these gifts and qualities she added a charm of manner and a grace of speech and motion, which even in her advanced age captivated all who met her. Such was the woman, now in her thirtieth year, who undoubtedly awoke a genuine passion in Goethe, and is one of the most interesting personalities who figure in his biography.

It was not on the occasion of his present journey, however, that their mutual attraction asserted itself in dangerous intensity. He met her towards the end of September while he was the guest of Fritz Schlosser, a nephew of his brother-in-law, J. G. Schlosser, and again in the second week of October. Between these two encounters an important event in her life took place, her marriage with her benefactor, Willemer. Thus he was placed in the same relation to her as to Maximiliane von la Roche and Frau von Stein, though it was not till the following year that the relations of Goethe and Marianne became embarrassing to all the parties concerned. Meantime, towards the end of October, he journeyed home to Weimar with a store of pleasant memories and valuable acquisitions. The *Divan* had grown on his hands, and his health and spirits were so improved that his friends found him rejuvenated.

He had derived so much mental and physical benefit from his Rhine and Main journey in 1814 that he determined to repeat it in the following year. He set out on May 24, a month earlier than in the previous year, and settled down first at Wiesbaden, where he remained till the second week of August, with the break of a few days towards the end of July. In the beginning of that month he received an invitation which he would not be disposed to refuse. It came from the great Prussian Minister of State, von Stein, and expressed the



latter's wish that Goethe would visit him at his castle of Nassau. When Goethe arrived at the castle, he found that von Stein was on the point of visiting Cologne on public business, and as the poet was specially desirous of making a careful examination of the cathedral there, the Minister and he made the journey together down the Rhine, partly by carriage and partly by boat. Goethe could not but recall that forty years before he had made the same journey with Lavater and Basedow as his travelling companions—he conducting himself like a German student on holiday.<sup>1</sup> In Cologne they met the poet and patriot Arndt, the close friend of von Stein. Arndt was not among the patriots who denounced Goethe for his lack of sympathy with the national aspirations, and he had an unbounded admiration for his genius, but he makes some frank remarks on Goethe's demeanour as he observed it on this occasion. What he noted in him was a want of ease before persons of rank and a compromising deference to it. His bearing towards von Stein was excusable, but it annoyed Arndt to see him assume an attitude of inferiority to some young military officers of high birth whose relatives were known to him. It seemed, indeed, to Arndt that Goethe never lost the consciousness of his bourgeois origin and that he was over-exacting of deference to his own acquired nobility. Arndt adds, however, that, in his converse with Goethe, von Stein, whose temper was naturally violent and overbearing, took a subdued tone which was unusual with him.

Von Stein, whose mind was open to every means of promoting the national culture,<sup>2</sup> requested that Goethe would write a memoir on the art and

<sup>1</sup> On this journey with von Stein Goethe read *Werther*, and he was heard to murmur the lines entitled *Diner zu Coblenz*, which he had written when on his journey with Lavater and Basedow.

<sup>2</sup> It was von Stein who founded and organized the Society for the publication of the *Monumenta Germaniæ Historica*.

antiquities of the Rhine and Main country.<sup>1</sup> In the previous year Goethe had made observations with the object of writing such a memoir, but in view of von Stein's request he considered it necessary to carry out a wider and more careful survey. Accordingly, in the second week of August, he started on a second journey of exploration, and visited successively Mainz, Frankfort, Darmstadt, Heidelberg and Carlsruhe. He was accompanied in his travels by Sulpiz Boisserée whose acquaintance with the objects he was investigating was invaluable to him. Our chief information regarding their movements comes from a detailed diary kept by Boisserée, one of the most interesting memorials that we possess of this period of Goethe's life. It reveals his universal curiosity and his indefatigable energy in mastering the details that were presented to him. It also shows in full relief his genial relations with youth which formed a pleasing characteristic of his old age. Boisserée was not a disciple; his sympathies were with the Romantics in religion and art; but he possessed personal qualities which seem specially to have attracted Goethe. At a later date, when he was attacked by a severe illness, Goethe wrote to him in terms of warm affection, laying stress on the fact that he, almost alone of the younger generation, remained faithful to him.

When Arndt met Goethe at Cologne, he was greatly struck by the change that had taken place in his demeanour since he saw him at Dresden two years before. Then he had been gloomy and coldly repellent; now he was happy, cheerful, and all amiability. The change in his mood was, as we have seen, due to his having found a new source of inspiration. The *Divan*, which had been his exhilarating companion in his previous journey, now engaged him more than ever, and he was almost daily adding to the number of pieces that were to

<sup>1</sup> The memoir was to be presented to von Hardenberg.

compose it. In the course of the previous year's journey his intercourse with Marianne von Willemer had suggested a new theme for his work and given fresh zest to his inspiration. It was during his present journey, however, that he was most deeply stirred by her influence. For about five weeks he was the guest of the Willemer family, partly at their town-house in Frankfort and partly at their country residence called the *Gerbermühle*. The *Gerbermühle* stood on the banks of the Main about half an hour's walk from Frankfort, and commanded a landscape of rich and varied beauty. A little further down the river is Offenbach, where forty years before Goethe had spent some days of bliss with Lili Schönemann. From what is recorded of the relations of Goethe and Marianne there we are led to infer that these weeks were marked by increasing emotion on the part of both. She evidently put forth all her powers of attraction; she sang his own songs with an art and feeling that unstrung him, and her general attitude to him was such as to appeal equally to the man and to the poet. His work at the *Divan* was known, and she entered into the spirit of it with an ardour of sympathy that invited a corresponding response. As has been said, she had a poetic gift of her own, and when he addressed her in amatory verses in the Oriental style of the *Divan*, she replied in the same form and in the same tone, with a freshness and beauty that have given her a high place among German poetesses. At length the situation between them became such that she found it desirable to urge his departure. On September 18 he left the *Gerbermühle*, but they still continued their amorous dallying. They agreed to communicate with each other in cyphers by references to pages in von Hammer's translation of Hafiz, which evoked other poems addressed to her by Goethe in the same strain. Five days later they met once more at Heidelberg, where Marianne and her husband went to take a



final leave of him. During the two days they now spent together their emotions were as ardent as ever, and in the moonlight of the first evening they vowed that they would think of each other hereafter on the occasion of every full moon. After this meeting they never saw one another again, and it was not till after her death in 1860 that a communication of Hermann Grimm made the world aware of her part in the *Divan*.

Goethe's intercourse with Marianne von Willemer lasted only a few weeks, but it gave him one of the vivid experiences of his life, and inspired a succession of poems with an exaltation of feeling, marvellous considering his age when he wrote them. The part of the *West-östlicher Divan* directly inspired by her, the *Buch Zuleika*, is but a section of the whole, but it is the section where the poet displays his richest resources. The book has to be read as a whole in order to receive the full impression of its successive flights of song in all their imaginative ingenuity ; but a few verses of Marianne and Goethe respectively will indicate the tone in which they addressed each other. It should be said that on his way to Wiesbaden on his second journey Goethe had fixed on the names, Hatem and Zuleika, for the two interlocutors in the *Divan*, who in the *Buch Zuleika* represent himself and the lady. It was on her way to Heidelberg that Marianne wrote the following stanzas, which some are disposed to rank higher than anything of Goethe's own in their poetical exchanges.

Ach, um deine feuchten Schwingen,  
West, wie sehr ich dich beneide :  
Denn du kannst ihm Kunde bringen,  
Was ich in der Trennung leide !

Die Bewegung deiner Flügel  
Weckt im Busen stilles Sehnen ;  
Blumen, Augen, Wald und Hügel  
Stehn bei deinem Hauch in Thränen.



Doch dein mildes, sanftes Wehen  
Kühlt die wunden Augenlider ;  
Ach, für Leid müsst' ich vergehen,  
Hofft' ich nicht zu sehn ihn wieder.

Eile denn zu meinem Lieben,  
Spreche sanft zu seinem Herzen ;  
Doch vermeid' ihn zu betrüben  
Und verbirg ihm meine Schmerzen.

Sag' ihm, aber sag's bescheiden ;  
Seine Liebe sei mein Leben,  
Freudiges Gefühl von beiden  
Wird mir seine Nähe geben.

On the morning following Marianne's arrival in Heidelberg, Goethe presented her with the following stanzas, entitled *Wiederfinden*.

Ist es möglich ? Stern der Sterne,  
Drück' ich wieder dich ans Herz ?  
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne  
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz !  
Ja du bist es ! meiner Freuden  
Süsser, lieber Widerpart !  
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden,  
Schaudr' ich von der Gegenwart.

Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde  
Lag an Gottes ew'ger Brust,  
Ordnet' er die erste Stunde  
Mit erhabner Schöpfungslust.  
Und er sprach das Wort : Es werde !  
Da erklang ein schmerzlich Ach !  
Als das All mit Machtgebärde  
In die Wirklichkeiten brach.

Auf that sich das Licht : so trennte  
Scheu sich Finsterniss von ihm,  
Und sogleich die Elemente  
Scheidend aus einander fliehn.  
Rasch, in wilden, wüsten Träumen  
Jedes nach der Weite rang,  
Starr, in ungemessnen Räumen,  
Ohne Sehnsucht, ohne Klang.

Stumm war alles, still und öde,  
 Einsam Gott zum erstenmal !  
 Da erschuf er Morgenröthe.  
 Die erbarmte sich der Qual ;  
 Sie entwickelte dem Trüben  
 Ein erklingend Farbenspiel,  
 Und nun konnte wieder lieben,  
 Was erst aus einander fiel.

Und mit eiligem Bestreben  
 Sucht sich, was sich angehört ;  
 Und zu ungemessnem Leben  
 Ist Gefühl und Blick gekehrt.  
 Sei's Ergreifen, sei es Raffen,  
 Wenn es nur sich fasst und hält !  
 Allah braucht nicht mehr zu schaffen ;  
 Wir erschaffen seine Welt.

So, mit morgenrothen Flügeln  
 Riss es mich an deinen Mund,  
 Und die Nacht mit tausend Siegeln  
 Kräftigt sternenhell den Bund.  
 Beide sind wir auf der Erde  
 Musterhaft in Freud' und Qual,  
 Und ein zweites Wort : " Es werde ! "  
 Trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal.

On October 10, Goethe was back in Weimar and with such a harvest of poems for the *Divan* that he could now proceed to divide them into books according to their themes. Three years more were to pass before he gave it to the world.

Goethe, as we know, had not been sanguine as to the political results for Germany of the War of Liberation, and the course that events followed after the war did not reassure him. The developments in his own Duchy of Saxe-Weimar gave him grave disquiet. As the result of the Congress of Vienna, forty German states were formed into a Confederation loosely bound together, and each at liberty to set up a constitution of its own. On account of the important services he had rendered during the war, Carl August was handsomely treated by the Congress ; he was made a Grand Duke and

the area of the Duchy was doubled. The Congress had promised that each of the forty States should have a constitution, and Carl August was the first ruler to redeem the pledge. Personally Goethe profited by these changes; he was made Prime Minister of the Ministry of State that took the place of the old Privy Council, and his salary was raised to 3000 thalers. But he regarded the new constitution with profound distrust and anxiety, granting, as it did, complete freedom of the Press and the election of representatives by free ballot to all Estates of the Duchy. His fears of a free Press were in his eyes immediately justified. A crowd of journals appeared throughout the Duchy and notably in Jena, where students and professors promulgated political ideals which, for Goethe, meant universal anarchy. He would have taken strong measures for their suppression, but the Duke refused to stultify himself by revoking a privilege which he had deliberately granted. The poet's own interests, however, were more nearly affected by the representative body (*Landtag*) created by the new constitution. Hitherto, as President of the Commission for Art and Science, he had been under no control in the matter of expenditure, but now he was legally required to render accounts to that body. One incident that belongs to a later date (1823) shows how he chafed under this check on his action. He was called on to make a statement of his expenditure for the year; he refused to do so; the *Landtag* was insistent, and the matter was referred to the Duke. The Duke knew that Goethe was in the wrong, but the Duchess intervened; and on the ground that there was only one Goethe and that a precedent was, therefore, not likely to be created, she persuaded the *Landtag* to pass over the defiance of its authority.

On April 7, 1816, a distasteful duty fell to Goethe. On that day all the dignitaries of the Duchy met to pay homage to the Duke for the new constitution,

and, as Prime Minister, it was incumbent on him to be present at the ceremony. In itself this could not be a pleasure to him, since he regarded the granting of the constitution as a disastrous error, but, as it happened, he was suffering from a rheumatic attack which made it dangerous for him to venture out-of-doors. A martinet with others on points of official duty, he had always been a martinet with himself. Recalling the words of Napoleon: "L'Empereur ne connaît autre maladie que la mort," he appeared at the ceremony, standing nearest the throne on the Duke's right hand. Thus, he wrote to Zelter, he performed a duty which he had discharged for forty years.

Two months later (June 6) Christiane passed away. During her last illness Goethe was himself prostrated with fever, and he was spared the sight of her sufferings which were of the cruellest nature. Towards the end he did see her and, overcome by his feelings, he fell on his knees at her bedside and passionately exclaimed, "Thou shalt not, thou canst not, leave me." That her loss went to his heart, we cannot doubt. It was a strange fate that had made them companions in life, for it is difficult to imagine a seemingly more ill-assorted pair. That he was sorely tried at times by her unfitness to fill the place he had given her we know, and his uniform tenderness and consideration for her prove his essential goodness of heart. It is touching to see how consistently he sought to enlist her interest in his own pursuits; during his lengthy absences he regularly communicated to her the successive stages of the work on which he was engaged, and even sent her copies of it for her judgment. That he long missed her devoted care of him, we have both his own evidence and that of those who knew him best. To Sulpiz Boisserée he wrote that he was brought to the brink of despair by her loss, and he expressed himself in similar terms to Zelter, Humboldt, and other friends. This



is the feeling which finds utterance in the lines in which he commemorated her death :

Du versuchst, O Sonne, vergebens,  
Durch die düstern Wolken zu scheinen !  
Der ganze Gewinn meines Lebens  
Ist, ihren Verlust zu beweinen.

It had been Goethe's intention to revisit Wiesbaden this year for the third time, and on July 20 he actually started on the journey. Before he had travelled half-way to Erfurt, however, his carriage broke down and, as the result of the accident, his travelling companion Meyer received a contusion on the forehead which bled alarmingly. There was a strain of superstition in Goethe which manifested itself in different incidents of his life ; in youth he had thrown his knife into the Main to determine whether destiny meant him to be a poet or a painter. On this occasion he had the idea that the omens were against his going to Wiesbaden, and he chose another destination—Tennstädt in Thuringia, whose sulphur springs were reputed to be beneficial in cases of rheumatism, the trouble from which he suffered. There he occupied himself from July 24 to September 10 in reposeful industry, interrupted only by an exasperating visitor. It was his old friend, the philologist Wolf, whose habit of contradiction had become intolerable. At an earlier time, as we have seen, there was no one from whose conversation Goethe had drawn greater profit, but now he regarded his departure with a feeling of relief.

In October Goethe was visited in Weimar by a young American, George Ticknor, the future historian of Spanish literature, who thus records his impression of him. "He is something above the middle size, large but not gross, with gray hair, and full, rich black eyes, which, though dimmed with age, are still very expressive. Taken together, his appearance is not only respectable, but imposing.

In his manners he is simple. He received us without ceremony, but with care and elegance, and made no German compliments. . . . We <sup>1</sup> remained with him nearly an hour, and when we came away, he accompanied us as far as the parlor door with the same simplicity with which he received us, without any German congratulations."

Goethe had disapproved of Carl August's policy in granting a free constitution to his Duchy and he had not concealed his opinion, but their opposing views never affected their personal relations. A pitiful incident, however, resulted in a temporary breach between them, in which the Duke showed the less worthy side of his character. A travelling comedian named Karsten had gained an extraordinary success in both France and Germany with a play, the principal incident of which was a poodle's discovery of a murder. Karsten applied to Goethe for permission to produce his play in Weimar. Goethe, who detested dogs, and who, as we know, had exalted notions of the dignity of the stage, refused in his capacity of Director of the Theatre. Put off by Goethe, Karsten made application to the Duke, who, liking dogs as much as Goethe loathed them, gave the necessary permission, and on April 12 (1817) the play was staged. Meantime Goethe, in high indignation, had gone to Jena, where he received a cold communication from the Duke to the effect that he relieved him of the Directorship as he had heard that this was Goethe's own wish. The Duke's action was in reality the outcome of a long intrigue that had been directed against Goethe's management by Caroline Jagemann, a distinguished singer and actress, who had been for some years the Duke's mistress. Old memories and his better nature, however, recalled the Duke to a sense of his inconsiderate conduct, and, following up a kindly and gracious letter to Goethe, he made

<sup>1</sup> Ticknor was accompanied by Edward Everett.

a special visit to Jena to effect a complete reconciliation. Goethe had declared many years before that he had more trouble than pleasure as theatrical manager, but the manner in which he had been treated, after all the anxious solicitude he had given to the office, deeply wounded him. It was not only that the Duke's conduct was a painful personal slight; there was the chagrin that all his labours to make the Weimar stage an agency of the highest culture had been spent in vain.

An event that happened in Goethe's household in the course of the summer gave him special pleasure; on June 17 his son August was married, and to a lady of whom his father highly approved. She was Ottilie von Pogwisch, the daughter of a Prussian major, whose divorced wife was one of the ladies of the Weimar Court. Goethe had known Ottilie from her childhood when she sang at his concerts and gave proof of a distinct musical talent. The pair, he wrote to Sulpiz Boisserée, seemed predestined for each other. He was sadly deceived; as August had grown up, he was unfit to be the husband of any woman. He had inherited his mother's weakness, and he was incapable of steady attachment or of purposeful action. Ottilie was a high-spirited woman, romantic in temper and accustomed from childhood to having her own way; mentally, moreover, she was superior to her husband, and she came to treat him with the contempt which his conduct deserved. They had not been long united before there came estrangement and eventually mutual antipathy, and as they were domiciled with Goethe, the father had the painful experience of seeing with his own eyes their unhappy relations. It was an alleviation, however, that he had a strong affection for Ottilie who returned it with an idolatrous regard; she had not the talents of a good housewife, but her sprightly gifts and her devoted care did much to brighten his declining years.



Speaking of his own indifference to the political ferment now working in Germany, Goethe compared himself to one who had learned to sleep in a mill. But there was some exaggeration in the comparison ; he took no direct part, indeed, in the political movements that were going on around him, but his letters and the records of his conversation show that he followed them with keen interest. He could not but be interested in the part which his own nursling, the University of Jena, was playing in the revolutionary movement for a free united Germany and the restoration of the Empire. The students at Jena, ardently supported by the professors, had led the way in the formation of the Students' Associations (*Burschenschaften*) whose object was the realization of these ideals. In 1817 they took a daring step, expressly intended to forward the movement of liberation. This year was the tercentenary of the Reformation and the third anniversary of the victory of Leipzig which freed Germany from French domination. To commemorate the two events they resolved to hold high festival at the Wartburg, Luther's place of refuge, and to invite the students of all the Protestant universities to join them in the celebration. Goethe's feelings with regard to the festival were somewhat mixed. There could be no objection, he said, to a gathering of enthusiastic youths binding themselves "to spend all their energies in their respective spheres of life." Though he regarded the Reformation in its general tendencies and results with qualified approval, he had the highest admiration for the character of Luther as Germany's great liberator. On the other hand, he had grave fears as to what might be the effect of the demonstration on the ruling powers in the country and the policy they might be led to adopt. The festival, which was held on October 18, passed off harmlessly enough. About five hundred students and professors attended it ; orations were delivered,



and the proceedings closed with a holocaust of anti-patriotic publications, among which, to Goethe's malicious delight, were those of his enemy Kotzebue, who had made himself obnoxious by acting as an agent of Russia.<sup>1</sup> But what followed as the direct result of the Wartburg Festival justified Goethe's fears. Under the ascendancy of Metternich, Germany, during the next decade, was subjected to a tyranny which aimed at the suppression of all popular liberties, and among the institutions most rigorously held in hand were the universities.

Amid all Goethe's manifold interests, the *Divan* still held the first place. New poems had been added to it since his second journey to Wiesbaden, and he had sedulously read all manner of books that threw light on the East. The year 1818 was mainly devoted to its completion. Six months of that year were spent away from Weimar, four of them in Jena at various times. In the beginning of June he was attacked by a serious illness which puzzled his physicians who ordered him to his old place of cure, Carlsbad. There he remained from the end of July till the middle of September, and met, as formerly, many distinguished persons, Metternich and Blücher among the number. Throughout these journeyings, however, the *Divan*, the printing of which had begun in February, went with him, and in the beginning of November it was ready for the press.<sup>2</sup>

We have seen how Goethe came to assume the Oriental guise which gives its character to the *West-östlicher Divan*. He found it pressingly necessary in the interest of his own well-being to transport himself to some ideal world, and in the world of Hafiz he found one that made a special appeal to him. Moreover, as the work grew on his hands, he felt, as he told Zelter, that the Oriental

<sup>1</sup> To Goethe's great annoyance Kotzebue had settled in Weimar and taken up his residence in a house opposite to his own.

<sup>2</sup> It was not published till the following year.

manner suited his age, his modes of thought, his experiences, and his discretion. As he himself describes it, the plan of the work is simple. The poet is to be regarded as a traveller in the East interested in its manners, customs and religion, and not annoyed if he is taken for a Mussulman. The meaning and purpose of the whole, he says, are given in the opening poem.

Nord und West und Süd zersplittern,  
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern.  
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten.  
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen,  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.

The collection, containing nearly three hundred pieces, is divided into twelve books, each with a title generally indicating its theme. We have the *Book of the Singer*, the *Book Hafiz*, the *Book of Love*, the *Book of Reflections*, etc. The general character of the style in which the poems were written will be suggested by those that have been quoted; as in the *Roman Elegies* Goethe made use of classical phraseology, so in the *Divan* he appropriates that of the East. But, as in the case of the *Roman Elegies*, while the style is exotic, the themes are suggested by the poet's own experience. "You will recognize an old friend behind the mask," he wrote to one correspondent, and he tells another that in reading the *Divan* he would notice how often the Platz and the Schloss of Heidelberg had been before the eyes of the writer. In truth, as has been already said, the *Divan* is the record of whatever interested Goethe in his own person during the period of its composition. We have seen how in one book, the *Book Suleika*, we have the presentment of his relations with Marianne von Willemer. The theme of that book is love, and in it the genius of the poet finds its intensest and highest expression, but it is in other books that we must look for the ripest thought

of Goethe on life and the world at the time when he wrote them. The *Divan* is, indeed, a treasure-house of reflections among the most familiar that he has bequeathed to us. A few of them, taken at random, may be quoted.

From the *Book of the Singer* :

Dann zuletzt ist unerlässlich,  
Dass der Dichter manches hasse,  
Was unendlich ist und hässlich,  
Nicht wie Schönes leben lasse.

---

Wenn des Dichters Mühle geht,  
Halte sie nicht ein ;  
Denn wer einmal uns versteht,  
Wird uns auch verzeihn.

---

Und so lang' du das nicht hast,  
Dieses : Stirb und werde !  
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast  
Auf der dunklen Erde.

From the *Book of Reflections* :

Was verkürzt mir die Zeit ?  
Thätigkeit !  
Was macht sie unerträglich lang ?  
Müssiggang !

---

Mir bleibt genug ! Es bleibt Idee and Liebe !

From the *Book of Aphorisms* :

Prüft das Geschick dich, weiss es wohl warum ;  
Es wünschte dich enthaltsam ! Folge stumm !

---

Mein Erbtheil wie herrlich weit und breit !  
Die Zeit ist mein Besitz, mein Acker ist die Zeit.

From the *Book Suleika* :

Volk und Knecht und Ueberwinder,  
Sie gestehn zu jeder Zeit :  
Höchstes Glück der Erdenkinder  
Sei nur die Persönlichkeit.

From the *Book of Paradise* :

Nicht so vieles Federlesen !  
Lass mich immer nur herein :  
Denn ich bin ein Mensch gewesen,  
Und das heisst ein Kämpfer sein.

On its appearance the *West-östlicher Divan* met with a mixed reception ; it had illustrious admirers, such as Alexander von Humboldt and Hegel, but the prevailing opinion was adverse. In later times it has been more generally appreciated, but the opinion of modern German critics is divided as to its place among Goethe's greater works. Traces of old age are found in its frequent obscurity and in a straining of the German language beyond legitimate limits. It may be said that the artificial form of the *Divan* necessarily precludes it from attaining the highest heaven of poetry, as for such flight simplicity of form and direct inspiration are the imperative conditions. But it will always have a special attraction, at least for mature readers, because of its wealth of wisdom and as a marvellous example of intellectual and imaginative power retained into advanced age, though, at the same time, it may be admitted that it is, "October's workmanship to rival May."

To the *Divan*, Goethe attached voluminous notes which he deemed necessary to explain and illuminate the world into which it transports the reader. These notes are of high value both for the light which they throw upon the East and for the self-revelations they contain. They are the result of years of strenuous study of Oriental things ; even of Arabic, which he learned to read, and whose characters, he says, he copied with the object of entering into the spirit of its literature. Beginning with a general survey of the characteristics of the East, he appraises the greater Persian poets in chronological order, and closes with an account of the travellers and scholars to whom he had been chiefly indebted. As literature,



the notes have a high place among Goethe's prose works ; Heine, a supreme judge, gives them unstinted praise. Here, indeed, we are far from the torrential flow of Goethe's earlier prose ; a measured calm and weighty reflectiveness suggest a mind that has travelled the round of human thought and experience.

Goethe's poetical production during the years 1814-19 was not confined to the *Divan* ; he threw off other poems, longer and shorter, some of which are memorable. Here it may be sufficient to mention the mysterious *Ballade*, which relates the return of the lord who was supposed to be dead ; the *Künstlerlied*, beginning "Zu erfinden, zu beschliessen" ; *Trauerloge* ; *Urworte-Orphisch* ; *Um Mitternacht*, the melody of which haunted Goethe's memory. The short poem entitled *Dem 31 Oktober 1817* is specially interesting at this point as expressing his attitude to the Protestant spirit in connection with the Wartburg celebration.

Dreihundert Jahre hat sich schon  
Der Protestant erwiesen,  
Dass ihn von Papst-und Türkenthron  
Befehle bass verdriessen.

Was auch der Pfaffe sinnt und schleicht,  
Der Prediger steht zur Wache,  
Und dass der Erbfeind nichts erreicht,  
Ist aller Deutschen Sache.

Auch ich soll gottgegebne Kraft  
Nicht ungenützt verlieren,  
Und will in Kunst und Wissenschaft  
Wie immer protestiren.

Poetry, however, was far from absorbing all Goethe's energies. Science engaged his attention as much as ever ; optics, geology, natural history, and meteorology successively occupied him, and in 1817 appeared his *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums*, one of the most interesting of his autobiographical fragments. During the same period

he saw a new edition of his works through the press, and he began to put together the narrative of his Italian travels, to which attention has already been drawn.<sup>1</sup> In 1816, in collaboration with Meyer, he started a journal, entitled *Kunst und Altertum*, which he continued to edit till 1828. Its first number contained the memoir on the art and antiquities in the Rhine and Main Country which von Stein had requested him to prepare for Hardenberg, and generally the journal was devoted to proclaiming the superiority of Greek to mediæval ideals in art and literature. In addition to his literary labours, as Commissioner for Science and Art in the Duchy, he gave sedulous attention to the institutions connected with these departments, and, notably, to the library of the University of Jena.

It was during this period that he became interested in a poet who was to have a growing fascination for him—a fascination which, in his friends' opinion, eventually became an infatuation. In 1816 he read Byron's *Corsair and Lara*, "not without admiration and sympathy." Repelled at first by Byron's "hypochondriacal passion," he became more and more interested in the personality of the man. In Byron's character and career, as they were gradually revealed to the world, Goethe doubtless saw a likeness to his own as he had been in his youthful days in Strassburg, Frankfort, and Weimar. He well knew how nearly he had made shipwreck of himself at certain periods of his life; only two years before his death he could write: "I have that in me which, if I allowed it to go unchecked, would ruin both myself and those about me." As we shall see, there was another contest with himself before him which was to strain all his powers of self-control.

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, pp. 241-346.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

ECKERMANN—ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW—  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

1819—1824

THE years during which Goethe had been engaged on the *West-östlicher Divan* had been years of exhilaration and of poetic productiveness; but in the years that immediately followed its publication (1819) he found no theme to stimulate him to similar creative activity. There was no slackening of toil on his part; as of old, every hour of his waking life was devoted either to the acquiring or to the propagating of what would profit himself and the world. But his frequent references to his advancing years show that he was feeling their "inevitable yoke more and more." It may be regarded as a proof of his failing imaginative power that he devoted his attention to the natural sciences in greater degree than ever. "I am now too old," he wrote to Zelter, "to be interested in questions of æsthetics," and his reported conversations and the space he assigns to his scientific pursuits in his *Annalen* are evidence that he was stating what he felt. With the prevailing contemporary tendencies in German literature, which he summarily described as "tom-foolery, sanctimoniousness, and affected fondness for antiquarianism," he grew more and more impatient,<sup>1</sup> and it was from the sense that he was out of sympathy with the German public that at

<sup>1</sup> In the *Tag- und Jahreshefte* he says that from 1820 he abstained from reading the productions of the younger German writers.

a later date he decided not to publish the Second Part of *Faust* during his lifetime. And he was equally out of sympathy with the political tendencies that followed the War of Liberation, for the repressive policy with which the name of Metternich is associated was as distasteful to him as were the liberal aspirations of which the University of Jena was the hotbed.

As it happens, we have an interesting commentary on Goethe's general attitude to men and things during the years following 1818. We have seen how in the *Divan* he gave expression to his varying moods, his personal experiences, and his opinions on life and art. It was a necessity, especially of his later years, thus to find brief and pregnant utterance for the thoughts and emotions that chanced at the moment to be preoccupying him, and the *Divan* being completed, he had now to look for another vehicle through which to deliver himself. This vehicle he found in the form which Schiller and he had chosen as the most effective weapon against the Philistinism of the day—the short epigrams in verse, which they entitled *Xenien*. As the new pieces, however, were not, like the previous series, deliberately conceived and written with a polemical purpose, he called them *Zahme Xenien*. Taken as a whole, they are of more general and permanent interest than those he had written in collaboration with Schiller. Among them are reflections on the conduct of life, on art and on literature, which belong to the common stock of Goethe quotations.<sup>1</sup> But their main interest is the light which they throw on Goethe's prevailing mood and his attitude to the world around him. They show that he felt himself a stranger and an alien in the generation that had succeeded his own.

<sup>1</sup> As, for example, the lines :

Wie das Gestirn,  
Ohne Hast,  
Aber ohne Rast,  
Drehe sich jeder,  
Um die eigne Last.



There is bitterness of spirit in his scathing denunciation of the Romantics in art and literature, the professional men of science, and the democrats and republicans in politics. He complains of his isolation, of the misunderstanding to which he is subjected both as a poet and as a student of nature.

Sage mir keiner :  
Hier soll ich hausen !  
Hier, mehr als draussen  
Bin ich alleiner.

Elsewhere he pathetically remarks that "an old man is ever a King Lear"; yet, in spite of misrepresentation and the absence of sympathy, he has no thought of desisting from the steadfast pursuit of his own ideals, and he finds consolation and stimulus in the fact that even in the younger generation there are those who understand and appreciate him.

Gutes zu empfangen, zu erweisen,  
Alter ! geh' auf Reisen.—  
Meine Freunde  
Sind aus einer Mittelzeit,  
Eine schöne Gemeinde ;  
Weit und breit,  
Auch entfernt,  
Haben sie von mir gelernt,  
In Gesinnung treu.

It was in this temper, bating no jot of heart or hope, though not with the serene composure of Milton in his last days, that Goethe pursued his unresting labours during the time that remained to him.

In his last years the expression frequently fell from his pen that "to live long is to outlive many." In the spring of 1819 he lost two friends to whom he had long been bound by ties of respect and affection. Fritz Jacobi, with whom was associated one of the most memorable experiences of his youth, died on March 11. He was in his twenty-fifth year when he first met Jacobi, and during the few days

they spent together there was an interchange of heart and mind, which both, with equal effusion, declared to have been unique in their experience. Time had revealed to them their essential differences of nature, and their opinions on religious and philosophical questions came to be so fundamentally opposed as to leave no common ground between them. But their mutual regard and affection remained unchanged. "Round your name," Goethe wrote five years later to a grand-daughter of Jacobi, "are gathered the most beautiful and most significant memories of my life." The other friend whom Goethe now lost (March 22) was taken from his side. This was C. G. Voigt who, after Goethe himself, had been the most important of the Duke's Ministers. Voigt was an official after Goethe's own heart—enlightened, scrupulously honourable, and ever awake to the best interests of the Duchy. They had occasionally differed on questions of policy, as, for example, on the granting of freedom to the Press; but each had leant on the other for counsel and support, and Voigt's death was among the grave losses of Goethe's last years.

The very next day occurred an event which Goethe thought Voigt was fortunate in not having lived to see. On March 23, Kotzebue, Goethe's old enemy, was assassinated by the student Karl Sand at Mannheim, as a traitor to the cause of German liberty. Kotzebue's death has been described as the most important event in German history from the War of Liberation to the Revolution of 1848, and, if we may judge from his frequent references to it, Goethe fully recognized its significance. He had, indeed, special reasons for concern regarding the consequences it might involve. Sand's crime had been the direct outcome of the *Burschenschaft* movement, and it was recognized as such by Metternich and the other statesmen who were bent on the suppression of popular liberties. But the students and professors of Jena had been

the most ardent supporters of the *Burschenschaft*, and Jena was in Carl August's dominions. In Metternich's opinion, therefore, Carl August, by his grant of a free constitution, was largely responsible for the rebellious spirit of young Germany. As Goethe probably knew, Metternich had openly expressed his indignation at Carl August's policy, and it was not unlikely that he would take some means of punishing him. A movement of Goethe during the autumn of 1819 may have had some relation to this menace to the Duke. In consequence of the political ferment in the country, intensified by the assassination of Kotzebue, the representatives of several German Governments met at Carlsbad in the beginning of August.<sup>1</sup> Metternich was the most important person present, and the object of the conference was to decide what measures were necessary to restrain the popular movement. The outcome of the deliberations was the "Carlsbad Decrees," the purport of which was to give despotic power to the separate States, and to deprive the Universities of their liberties. While the conference was still proceeding, Goethe chose to go to Carlsbad, and had the opportunity of intercourse with several of the leading politicians present—with Metternich among others. As we have seen, he had previously met Metternich and found in him a well-wisher. Goethe does not tell us what subjects they discussed on this occasion, and his only remark is that he found Metternich, as formerly, "a gracious gentleman." It is improbable that Goethe, whose devotion to the Duke was a passion, would lose the opportunity of speaking a word in his master's interests.

No events of special importance mark the course of Goethe's life during the years 1819-23. He continued to follow the old routine, dividing the year between Weimar, Jena, and some watering-place.

<sup>1</sup> Carl August sent a representative to the Conference, but he was permitted to attend only one out of its twenty-three meetings.



Only we note that he felt the increasing necessity of husbanding his resources. Frequent illnesses, more or less serious, forced him to seek some place of cure, but it was against his will that he left Weimar for any length of time. "I can no longer feel happy anywhere except in my own home," he wrote to Zelter in the spring of 1819. He ceased to attend the Court, and during the winter rarely went beyond his own garden. But frequent social intercourse had always been a necessity of his nature, and he made arrangements that he should not be debarred from it. On Tuesdays and Thursdays he held receptions, when large companies assembled, music and miscellaneous discussion being the entertainment of the evening. To these social gatherings came the Duke and Duchess and their courtiers, as well as distinguished strangers on a visit to Weimar, among whom, Goethe notes, were occasionally cultivated Englishmen. On the other evenings of the week there was a narrower circle, consisting of men and women with whom discussion took higher flights. Thus, Goethe comments, he perhaps enjoyed more intimate and more searching converse than in the distractions of out-of-door society.

The year 1823 is memorable in Goethe's life; for in the course of it he was brought into contact with the man who was to add the crowning edifice to his life's work; and he was once more mastered by a passion for a woman—the last of the many similar experiences that had made epochs in his life. It is one of the fortunate accidents in the history of literature that Goethe became acquainted with Eckermann just at the period when he was best prepared and disposed to profit by his good offices. Their association lasted for nine years, and these the years of Goethe's ripest thought and experience, when he had arrived at his final conclusions regarding life and art.

Eckermann had had a history which commended



him to Goethe before he saw him. The son of a pedlar, he had fought his way to knowledge in the teeth of difficulties which only a strong instinct could have enabled him to overcome. His chief interests were in poetry and art, and it was these interests that led him to make approaches to Goethe as the great master in both. Previous to their first interview (June 9, 1823) he had sent Goethe a copy of his poems, accompanying it with an account of his past life. Apparently Goethe at once recognized that his correspondent possessed precisely the qualities and measure of attainments that might make him useful. Eckermann had only come on a visit to see the object of his worship, but Goethe persuaded him to take up his permanent residence in Weimar, and thus began the relation between them which has made their names inseparable. We owe Eckermann a double debt in connection with Goethe; his record of Goethe's conversations is a permanent addition to the literature of the world, and but for him the Second Part of *Faust* would never have been completed. Early in their intercourse, Eckermann conceived the idea of noting down Goethe's conversation, and it was with Goethe's knowledge and consent that he carried out the task. Goethe saw some specimens of Eckermann's reports and approved of them, but he did not supervise the completed record, which was not published till 1836, four years after his death.<sup>1</sup> It is generally accepted, however, that Eckermann was a faithful recorder. He fell into errors of fact, and he occasionally misunderstood what he heard, but his attitude to Goethe was too reverential to permit him to take liberties with the oracle. The analogy between Eckermann and Boswell is obvious, and it is true that they had certain characteristics in common. They had the same unquestioning faith in the object of their worship. This, however,

<sup>1</sup> In two subsequent editions Eckermann corrected and added to the first.

did not prevent either from obtruding his egotism and self-complacency in a manner which has made him a somewhat ridiculous figure in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, though it is right to say that Eckermann is less absurd than his Scottish rival. Their books, however, hardly bear comparison; while Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is a consummate work of art, Eckermann's record shows no constructive or imaginative power such as marks a creative artist. While Eckermann makes Goethe discourse, Boswell makes Johnson talk, and talk in such a manner and in such a variety of circumstances that his record is a succession of dramatic scenes. On the other hand, in depth, range, and universality of appeal the utterances of Goethe are beyond the reach of Johnson. Johnson, Carlyle wrote, "sees and knows nothing beyond England." Outside his own people, neither his personality nor his talk has interested the world, whereas the thought of Goethe, which has the idiosyncrasy of no people and the impersonal character of unbiassed search for truth, remains of permanent interest to every educated mind. With no remarkable gifts, therefore, Eckermann produced a book which condenses the ripest wisdom and experiences of one of the most comprehensive minds the world has known. And to Goethe himself he did a special service, for, with the exception of *Faust*, no book of his own has made him better known to the general public than the work of Eckermann. Nor was the gain all Goethe's; the desire for literary distinction was Eckermann's strongest passion, but by no writing of his own could he have achieved the fame which will ever be his as the worthy reporter of his master.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Goethe found another reporter of his conversation besides Eckermann. This was Friedrich Soret, born in Russia, but of Swiss extraction. In 1822 Soret was appointed tutor to the heir of Carl August, and became an intimate of the Goethe family. His special studies were mineralogy and optics, and Goethe warmly acknowledged his debt to him in these subjects. Soret had greater independence of mind than Eckermann, and his reports are less close to the words actually spoken by Goethe. He

According to Plato, Sophocles counted it a great gain of old age that it freed him from the enslavement of love. Goethe's old age brought him no such immunity; in his fifty-eighth year he had fallen in love with Minna Herzlieb, and in his sixty-sixth with Marianne von Willemer. Now, when he had passed his seventieth year, he became the victim of a passion which, if we may judge from the moral and physical effects it produced in him, was as violent as any of his previous experiences of a similar nature. It was his last experience of the kind, and he signalized it by a series of poems which are among the most remarkable he ever wrote.

In 1821 he chose to sojourn in Marienbad in preference to Carlsbad for the benefit of his health, and, while resident there, had much intercourse with a family of the name of von Levetzow. It consisted of the mother, a widow, and three daughters, the eldest of whom was named Ulrike.<sup>1</sup> Goethe was specially attracted by Ulrike. She was only seventeen, and was in no way remarkable for gifts or attainments, but she had a winning grace of face and person, with an amiability and freshness of nature, which gave her all the charm of "sweet seventeen." Goethe saw much of her and was taken with her lively responsiveness, but his feeling for her did not apparently go beyond an emotion of pleasure in her company. The following year he revisited Marienbad, and during some weeks' further intercourse with her (June 16—July 24)<sup>2</sup> his feelings grew warmer. On parting from her he addressed to her a poem (*Aeolsharfen*) in which, in the form of a dialogue between them, he expresses sentiments

had not, like Eckermann, the deliberate intention of systematically reporting Goethe, and he only recorded such conversations as specially interested him. He eventually handed his reports to Eckermann, who embodied them in his book, though with considerable modifications.

<sup>1</sup> Goethe had previously met the mother, who seemed to him to realize his Pandora.

<sup>2</sup> The Levetzows left Marienbad on July 24, Goethe remained behind till August 29.



which suggest the relations of lovers.<sup>1</sup> It was in the summer of 1823, when they met for the third time at Marienbad, that his feeling became an overmastering passion. Was the passion reciprocated? Goethe was now seventy-four and Ulrike nineteen, but such disparity of age has not always precluded relations that have led to union. The evidences as to Ulrike's feelings are somewhat conflicting. If we are to believe some of her reported words, she never regarded Goethe as other than an old man, who, great and famous as he was, showed her so much kindness and attention that it was impossible for her not to be drawn to him. On the other hand, she is reputed to have said that, had her mother desired it, she would have been willing to marry him. That the mother's consent was asked, either by Goethe himself or by the Duke as intermediary, we are definitely told, and we know that her reply amounted to a refusal. It was a bitter disillusion for Goethe, as he had been so confident that Ulrike would be his that he wrote to his family to announce his approaching marriage. The parting took place at Carlsbad, whither the Levetzows had gone, Goethe accompanying them. There was apparently no estrangement, and Ulrike kissed him twice when he took what was to be his final leave of her, for they never met again.

The lesson of life on which Goethe most insistently dwells is the necessity of renunciation, if serenity is to be won and duty happily discharged. The lesson had been forced on him by painful experience at many periods of his life. Twice in his advanced years he had to renounce objects on which he had passionately set his heart. We have seen the mental struggle it cost him when he had to submit to the loss of Minna Herzlieb—a struggle which found expression in the lyric intensity of *Pandora*, and in the case of Ulrike von Levetzow his effort at

<sup>1</sup> Over this poem Goethe inscribed the words: "Liebeschmerzlicher Zwiegesang unmittelbar nach dem Scheiden."



self-recovery was of the nature of a convulsion. In the third week of September he returned to Weimar in a depth of depression he had hardly known since the days of *Werther*. The atmosphere he found at home was not such as to soothe or cheer him. Both his son and his daughter-in-law had heard with indignation of his intended marriage, and they made no concealment of their feelings. The conduct of the son to his father, even in the presence of strangers, was rude to brutality. Chancellor von Müller, who saw Goethe frequently at this time, describes his mental condition as one of despair, and expresses his surprise that a man of his gifts and character should have been so overmastered by any passion.

At the close of November there came a visitor to Weimar, whose special gift, according to Goethe's own expression, "first restored him to himself." She was a Madame Szymanowska, a Polish lady, pianist to the Empress of Russia. He had met her in Marienbad during his late residence there, and her playing had profoundly moved him. Of late years music had made a special appeal to him; in the winter of 1821 he had been visited by Zelter and his musical prodigy, the boy Felix Mendelssohn, whose performances on the piano had given him some days' extraordinary pleasure, and had evoked a tenderness and playfulness which left an ineffaceable impression on Mendelssohn. Now, in his state of mental distemperature, the playing of Szymanowska exercised a spell which held him for hours in rapt absorption. But the strain on his emotions during the last months had overtaxed his physical strength, and shortly after her departure there came a collapse which for a few weeks seriously alarmed his friends. His powers of recovery, however, seem to have been as remarkable as his susceptibility to violent disorders, and by the beginning of December he was able to enjoy a visit from Zelter, the most exhilarating of men. His

passion for Ulrike had spent itself and renunciation had come at length; though at a later period of life than Milton, he had attained "calm of life, all passion spent."

The *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* is the remarkable memorial of Goethe's last passion for a woman. It consists of three distinct pieces, *An Werther*, *Elegie*, and *Aussöhnung* or *Reconciliation*. They were not produced in the order in which he subsequently arranged them. *Aussöhnung* was written first and was prompted by the playing of Madame Szymanowska in Marienbad at the time when Ulrike was lost to him; the *Elegie* was mainly composed on his journey home from Carlsbad; and *An Werther* not till the following year. The link between the three poems is his passion for Ulrike, and its renunciation. Written as an introduction to the jubilee edition of *Werther*, the first piece in the *Trilogie* associates the fate of Werther with his loss of Ulrike, for whom, as Goethe told Eckermann, some of his former passion still remained. The central poem, the *Elegie*, is the most important of the three, and for Goethe it remained permanently a hallowed memory as the expression of one of the deepest, richest, and most heart-searching experiences of his life. It consists of twenty-three stanzas in which he recalls the successive phases of emotion that had been roused by his relations to Ulrike. In the expression of passionate regret for what he had lost it stands alone among Goethe's poems. Yet it is the passion of age and not of youth, for the passion is blended throughout with a reflectiveness that takes full account of the loss and gain that had accrued to him from his abandonment to the object of his love. The poem concludes in the despairing mood of Werther—

Mir ist das All, ich bin mir selbst verloren,  
Der ich noch erst den Göttern Liebling war ;  
Sie prüften mich, verliehen mir Pandoren,  
Soe reich an Gütern, reicher an Gefahr ;

Sie drängten mich zum gabeselligen Munde,  
Sie trennen mich, und richten mich zu Grunde.

To end on such a note was contrary both to Goethe's artistic instincts and to his general attitude to life, and this may have been his reason for closing the *Trilogie* with *Aussöhnung* which came first in date of composition. Placed where it stands, it may be said to have a double appropriateness; ethically and artistically it is a satisfying pendant to the *Elegie*, the burden of which is despair, and it records what we have seen to be the actual fact, that by music Goethe was "restored to himself."

Da schwebt hervor Musik mit Engelschwingen,  
Verflucht zu Millionen Tön' um Töne,  
Des Menschen Wesen durch und durch zu dringen,  
Zu überfüllen ihn mit ew' ger Schöne;  
Das Auge netzt sich, fühlt im höhern Sehnen  
Den Götter-wert der Töne, wie der Thränen.

Und so das Herz erleichtert merkt behende,  
Dass es noch lebt und schlägt und möchte schlagen,  
Zum reichsten Dank der überreichen Spende,  
Sich selbst erwiedernd willig darzutragen.  
Da fühlte sich—o dass es ewig bliebe!—  
Das Doppel-glück der Töne wie der Liebe.

The *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* is the most memorable of the poems belonging to the years 1819–24, but we have other short pieces of the same period that call for passing reference. As has been said, science at this time absorbed more of Goethe's attention than literature, and he composed a number of short poems in which he expounds the philosophy of nature at which he had arrived. Such are the two entitled *Allerdings* and *Ultimatum*, in which he satirizes the materialistic conception of nature. A new science which now keenly interested him was meteorology, and he read with lively curiosity the works of the English chemist, Luke Howard, a pioneer in that subject. The speculations of Howard seem to have appealed to him both as a



poet and as a student of nature, and he wrote a series of short pieces in which he expounds in highly figurative language Howard's explanations of the different kinds of clouds. Better known is another poem produced during the same period, the exhilarating *Wanderlied*, beginning "Von dem Berge zu den Hügeln," which subsequently appeared in the *Wanderjahre* and which Carlyle's translation has made familiar to English readers.

Next in importance to the *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* among the poems of this period, however, is that entitled *Paria*. For forty years, Goethe told Eckermann, he had carried its theme in his head and heart, so that it is not a production prompted by a suggestion of the moment, but is rather the expression of a dominating thought. It, also, is in the form of a trilogy, its three parts being respectively entitled, *Des Paria Gebet*, *Legende*, and *Dank des Paria*. In the first part a Pariah implores Brahma for a miracle which will prove that he has regard to Pariahs as well as to Brahmins, and the tale told in the gruesomely tragic legend is the answer to his prayer. A Brahmin's wife was in the habit of going for water from the sacred Ganges. She has no need of a vessel, as the water formed itself in her hand into a crystal globe which she carried home. One morning on the way to the river she sees the figure of a divine youth descending from the heavens, and cannot tear her eyes from the vision. With conflicting feelings she proceeds to the river, but to her dismay she finds that the water eludes her grasp. On her appearance before her husband, her looks betray her, and, conducting her to the hill of death, he severs her head from her body with his sword. Returning to the house with the bloody weapon, he meets his son who, on learning that it is his mother who has been slain, convinces his father of her innocence by the fact that the blood on the blade has not dried. He is on the point of rushing to the hill of death with the



intention of slaying himself with the same fatal sword, when the father, convinced of his wife's innocence, bids him place her head on her body, which, touched by the sword, will arise and follow him. And now comes the part of the legend which embodies the idea that had been lodged so long in Goethe's mind. The son attaches his mother's head to the body of a guilty woman who had suffered a similar death, and the mother, arising and assuming gigantic proportions, addresses her son in words which are meant to convey the import of her fate. For endless ages she must henceforth live with her head, as a Brahmin, in heaven, but with her body, as a Pariah, on earth. The temptation that ended in her death was sent by Brahma, but with beneficent intention, and in the following lines she somewhat darkly expresses Brahma's goodwill:—

Immer wird es wieder kehren  
Immer steigen, immer sinken,  
Sich verdüstern, sich verklären,  
So hat Brahma dies gewollt.  
Er gebot ja buntem Fittich,  
Klarem Antlitz, schlanken Gliedern,  
Göttlich-einzigem Erscheinen,  
Mich zu prüfen, zu verführen ;  
Denn von oben kommt Verführung,  
Wenn's den Göttern so beliebt.

Und so soll ich, die Brahmane,  
Mit dem Haupt im Himmel weilend,  
Fühlen, Paria, dieser Erde  
Niederziehende Gewalt.

Sohn, ich sende dich dem Vater !  
Tröste !—Nicht ein traurig Büssen,  
Stumpfes Harren, stolz Verdienen  
Halt' euch in der Wildniss fest ;  
Wandert aus durch alle Welten,  
Wandelt hin durch alle Zeiten,  
Und verkündet auch Geringstem :  
Dass ihn Brahma droben hört !

In the concluding part of the trilogy the Pariah

pours forth his gratitude for the revelation of Brahma's all-embracing mercy :

Grosser Brahma ! nun erkenn' ich,  
Dass du Schöpfer bist der Welten !  
Dich als meinen Herrscher nenn' ich,  
Denn du lässtest alle gelten.

In a short paper, entitled *Die Drei Paria*,<sup>1</sup> Goethe has stated somewhat more explicitly the import of the *Legend* ; mankind, he says, need for their salvation a mediator who combines in his own person the highest and the lowest. Here we have an approach to the Christian conception of redemption ; and, in truth, of late years a change had been taking place in Goethe's attitude to Christianity. In the period that immediately followed his return from the Italian journey he had flaunted his paganism, and openly told his friends that he held with Lucretius on the question of immortality. But in a letter written in 1823 we have a remarkable attestation to his altered opinions. The letter was occasioned by a communication he had received from a lady with whom he had had a strange passage in his youth—the Countess von Stolberg (now Countess von Bernstorff), who in her enthusiasm for the author of *Werther*, had opened an anonymous correspondence with him which passed, on his side, into rhapsody. In her old age she was as intense in her religious opinions as she had been in her youthful sentimentalism, and in her letter to Goethe she expressed her grave concern at his lost condition and urged him to think of his eternal welfare. He took her letter in good part, and the conclusion of his reply, if it was the utterance of his real thoughts, shows that he no longer held the Lucretian doctrine. “ All my life long,” he wrote, “ I have dealt honestly by myself and others, and in all my earthly striving have always looked to what is highest ; you and

<sup>1</sup> The three were Casimir Delavigne's *Le Paria*, Michael Beer's *Der Paria* and his own poem.

yours have done likewise. Let us then work so long as it is day ; for others a sun will also shine, they will play their part, and meantime a clearer light will shine for us. And so let us abide untroubled regarding the future. In our Father's house are many mansions ; and since here he has prepared for us such a cheerful abode, so, of a certainty, will provision be made for both of us yonder ; perhaps we shall attain there what we have missed here—to know each other face to face, and, therefore, love with a deeper love. Think of me in calm confidence.”

Goethe produced no poetical work on a large scale during the years 1818–24, but in other fields they were years of industrious effort. As has been said, it was science that chiefly engaged him. Impelled by his insatiable curiosity regarding the universal processes of nature, he gave his attention in turn to optics, geology, botany, zoology, anthropology, and meteorology, in each case carefully noting the results of his observations. This need of varying the subjects that occupied him was characteristic of him at all periods of his life. During the period before us he worked successively at *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, the *Wanderjahre*, his *Second Residence in Rome*, the *Campaign in France*, the *Siege of Mainz*, and at the correspondence between himself and Schiller. At the same time wide reading went along with original production, and it is interesting to note his growing preoccupation with foreign literatures. A dominating idea with him in his last years was the conception of a world-literature, to which every nation should make its individual contribution. “Study of foreign languages and recognition of our neighbours,” he wrote to Knebel, “is to be furthered that all may be gathered together as one flock under one shepherd.”

His own reading in foreign literatures was sufficiently extensive. Revived discussion on the

unity of the *Iliad* led him to a close study of Homer to whom in youth he had owed so much. He re-read Wolf's *Prolegomena* and, to obtain a clear conception of the *Iliad* as a whole, he re-drafted a scheme of the poem which he had written in the days of his association with Schiller. Among modern literatures he kept in touch with French, Spanish, Italian, and English. He hailed the appearance of Manzoni, of whose *Carmagnola* he wrote an appreciative notice, which, by Manzoni's own testimony, made the latter's reputation among his countrymen. But it was English literature which at this time chiefly interested him.<sup>1</sup>

At various periods of his life Goethe pronounced judgments on English writers which, interesting as they are as coming from him, may conveniently be brought together here.<sup>2</sup> Some of these judgments, it will be seen, confirm our own, but others are sufficiently startling. As Sir John Seeley has pointed out, Goethe may claim to have been the first to appreciate Shakespeare's real greatness, inasmuch as he anticipated both Schlegel and Coleridge. Goethe's opinions regarding Shakespeare as a dramatist changed in the course of his own development, but his abiding attitude to him is expressed in his remark to Eckermann in his latest years: Shakespeare "is a being of a higher order, to whom I look up, and whom I hold in reverence." At many points Goethe was antipathetic to Milton, and he characteristically found the subject of *Paradise Lost* "abominable, externally plausible, but inwardly worm-eaten, and hollow"—words almost identical with those which he applies to the *Divine Comedy*. On the other hand, for *Samson Agonistes* he had a deep admiration. "I can cite no work," he wrote

<sup>1</sup> Carl August had an agent in London who supplied him with English books.

<sup>2</sup> There are two advantages, Goethe once remarked, which English poets have over those of all other countries: as a double source of inspiration, they have Shakespeare and the sea.



to Zelter, "which has so closely reproduced the spirit and manner of ancient Greek tragedy, and equally by its power and by its execution deserves a like acknowledgment." An English writer who had a peculiar attraction for him was Sterne, and, high as the rank we at home assign to Sterne, Goethe's estimate of him may seem somewhat exaggerated. He regarded him as a *Befreier*—a liberator of the human spirit from pedantry and convention. "Yorick Sterne," he boldly affirms, "is the finest spirit who ever expressed himself in literature; whoever reads him feels himself freed and ennobled; his humour is inimitable, and it is not every kind of humour that frees the soul." Goldsmith was another writer to whom Goethe acknowledges a permanent moral debt, dating from his twenty-second year, when Herder made him acquainted with the *Vicar of Wakefield*. What he found in the *Vicar* was a humane morality, "without a trace of cant or pedantry." Macpherson's *Ossian* was a passing obsession of his youth which he gave to Werther, but his mature judgment upon it was virtually that of Wordsworth. In Burns he recognized "one of the greatest poetical spirits of the eighteenth century," who owed his greatness to the double circumstance that he inherited a living tradition of song and found a responsive audience—circumstances, Goethe adds, which had not favoured his own production. It is significant that of the English poets who flourished in the opening of the nineteenth century, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were unknown to him. In an unhappy moment Crabb Robinson read to him Coleridge's *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, and Robinson records that "his praise was faint." Moore he did not hold of much account, dismissing him with the remark that he might have "a few laurel leaves in a ragoût." In Campbell he found "strength, combined with great natural simplicity of style, and a power of exciting high emotions,

independent of brilliant epithets and meretricious ornaments."

But, of his English contemporaries, Scott and Byron were the two writers who chiefly interested him. Of Scott's poetry he does not speak, but he frequently expressed his opinion of the novels, and, as they are reported, his judgments are conflicting. The estimate of them most generally quoted is that recorded by Eckermann. "All is great [in the *Waverley Novels*], material, import, characters, execution; and then what infinite diligence in the preparatory studies! What truth of detail in the execution!" On the other hand, Chancellor von Müller reports him as pronouncing a much less favourable judgment. "I have read two of Walter Scott's novels," Müller makes him say, "and now I know what he aims at and what he can do. He would always entertain me, but I can learn nothing from him; I have time only for the very best."<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt, however, that Goethe's judgment on the *Waverley Novels*, as reported by Eckermann, expresses his abiding opinion; since in the *Conversations* he is repeatedly represented as speaking of Scott with the highest admiration.<sup>2</sup>

Great as was Goethe's admiration of Scott, he did not put him in the same category with Byron as a creative force. "Byron alone I put in the same category as myself," he said to von Müller; "Walter Scott is nothing compared with Byron." Byron was, in truth, the last of the many spiritual influences under which Goethe successively came in the course of his long life.<sup>3</sup> "Goethe," Tieck

<sup>1</sup> Müller's report is of date, 1823; that of Eckermann, 1831. Another reporter of Goethe says that he found him "not very enthusiastic about the 'Great Unknown.'" Goethe read Scott's *Life of Napoleon* with intense interest, and spent the evenings of a whole winter over it.

<sup>2</sup> In July, 1827, Goethe received a long letter from Scott, which gave him great pleasure. In this letter Scott states that he is sending Goethe his *Life of Napoleon*.

<sup>3</sup> Goethe admitted to Eckermann that the *Elegie* in the *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* had been influenced by Byron.

remarked to Crabb Robinson, "is infatuated about Byron," and, according to Eckermann, Goethe's feeling towards his young contemporary was that of a father to a son. It is interesting, therefore, to consider what, in Goethe's opinion, was Byron's place among the poets of the world. In one startling remark, reported by Eckermann, he seems to place Byron above Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> As other comments of his on Byron show, however, this could not have been his meaning. "Compared with Pope," von Müller reports Goethe as saying, "Byron is a giant; compared with Shakespeare he is a dwarf." Elsewhere he distinctly marks what he considered Byron's limitations. There is his well-known dictum that "the moment he [Byron] reflects, he is a child." To a similar effect is the following deliberate judgment. "Only when Byron expresses the results of his direct observation is his judgment sound and clear. Reflection is not his strong point; his judgments and combinations when they proceed from reflection are those of a child." What Goethe seems to have found distinctive in Byron was a mysterious force which made him a unique figure not only among his contemporaries, but among poets of all ages. In a short paper which he devoted to his memory, he expressly makes this claim for him. "Byron's like," he there says, "is not to be found in past centuries; the elements necessary for appraising such a career are wholly wanting."

As Byron was ignorant of German,<sup>2</sup> he could have no appreciation of Goethe's work as a whole,

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's words, as reported by Eckermann, are: "Die Engländer mögen auch von Byron halten was sie wollen, so ist doch soviel gewiss, das sie keinen Poeten aufzuweisen haben, der ihm zu vergleichen wäre. Er ist anders als alle übrigen und meistens grösser." Matthew Arnold (Introduction to his *Selections from Wordsworth*) maintains that the expression *der ihm zu vergleichen wäre*, rightly understood, does not imply that Byron was a greater poet than Shakespeare. He translated the phrase "who is his parallel."

<sup>2</sup> Monk Lewis translated the First Part of *Faust* to him by word of mouth. The opening verses of the *Bride of Abydos*, beginning, "Know ye the land of the eypress and myrtle," are an imitation of Mignon's Song.



but he fully recognized his supreme place in the contemporary literature of Europe. He dedicated *Werner* and *Sardanapalus* to him; and the latter dedication is from "a literary vassal to his liege lord." In the spring of 1823, when on the eve of starting for Greece, Byron sent Goethe a few lines introducing to him a Mr. Sterling, and in acknowledgment of them Goethe responded by some stanzas which Byron received at Leghorn. The last of these contains a note of warning which Byron in one of his petulant moods might have resented.<sup>1</sup>

Wohl sei ihm doch, wenn er sich selbst empfindet!  
 Er wage selbst sich hochbeglückt zu nennen,  
 Wenn Musenkraft die Schmerzen überwindet;  
 Und wie ich ihn erkannt, mög' er sich kennen.

On the very day he finally sailed for Greece, Byron answered Goethe's communication and in terms that could not have been more pleasing to the recipient. It would ill become him, he wrote, "to exchange verses with one who, for fifty years, has been the undisputed sovereign of European literature," and in the bustle of his departure he must content himself with his sincere acknowledgments in "hasty prose." Should he return from Greece, he added, he would visit Weimar and pay Goethe the homage of one of the many millions of his admirers.<sup>2</sup> Had the meeting ever taken place, Goethe would assuredly have held it as an event second only in interest to his meeting with Napoleon.

The homage of Scott and Byron shows that there were then persons in this country who recognized Goethe's supremacy in European literature, but the professional critics of the time did not share

<sup>1</sup> He gave rein to one of these petulant moods in a Dedication to *Marino Faliero* (1820), which fortunately was not transmitted. Moore calls it a "very singular dedication," written in the poet's "most whimsical and mocking mood." It is printed in Moore's *Life of Byron*.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe says that he treasured Byron's letter as one of his most valued possessions.



their opinion. What strikes us, indeed, in their criticisms is their complete unconsciousness of what the world has come to acknowledge, that Goethe is one of the master-minds of the race. One critic, however, appeared who, if he failed to interpret adequately Goethe's work as a whole, at least realized its greatness. In 1824 Carlyle sent Goethe his translation of *Wilhelm Meister*, and there began that intercourse between them which, on Carlyle's part, was that of a grateful worshipper. It was a genuine pleasure to Goethe to have found an interpreter who endeavoured to place him in his true light before the eyes of a great people for whom he had a sincere admiration. But he had also a disinterested reason for attaching high importance to Carlyle as an interpreter of German thought to England—a reason which he thus states in a remark to Eckermann. "It is in the sphere of æsthetics that we Germans are weakest, and we may have to wait long till we meet with such another as Carlyle. It is pleasant to see such close intercourse between the French, English, and Germans, as we are thus in a position to correct the faults of each other." It was therefore as his fellow-worker in the endeavour to realize the conception of a world-literature that Goethe especially valued Carlyle, and he found in him, moreover, precisely the qualities to which he himself attached most importance in an interpreter of national thought.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### CLOSING YEARS OF WORK

1825—1831

ON the completion of the Second Part of *Faust* in June, 1831, Goethe said to Eckermann: "What remains to me of life I may now regard as a free gift, and it really matters little what I do, or whether I do anything"; and to the same purport, in the November following, he wrote to Zelter that he was leading only "a testamentary and codicillary existence." By the summer of 1831, therefore, he regarded his work as done. He had still some eight months to live, and for his nature complete abstinence from toil of every kind was impossible. He touched up the completed Second Part of *Faust*, wrote a few short poems, and, so far as strength would permit, continued his scientific investigations, but creative work in prose or verse he ceased to attempt.

He had well earned the repose of the few months that remained to him, for at no period had he been more strenuously productive than in the years between 1825 and 1831. During these years, besides labour of minor importance, he saw through the press the forty volumes of his collected works, composed the narrative of his second residence in Rome, and finished *Dichtung und Wahrheit*,<sup>1</sup> *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, and the Second Part of *Faust*. Such persistent creative effort was something new in Goethe, but it had an efficient cause. All his life, as he so frequently tells us, some external

<sup>1</sup> He did not finish *Dichtung und Wahrheit* till October, 1831.

impulse was necessary to incite him to production, and the external incitement during these years was his approaching end.

The conditions under which he lived during his closing years favoured uninterrupted industry. His growing infirmities put an end to his expeditions to distant watering-places; Jena he visited, but twice after 1825, in each case only for a day; and even in Weimar he paid few calls on his neighbours. He still retained the direction of education and of the roads and buildings in the Duchy, but it was in his own house that he mostly came in contact with the outer world. He had daily visitors, friends in Weimar or strangers distinguished by rank or achievement, who came in a steady stream as to a place of pilgrimage. His familiars were Eckermann, Soret, Meyer, Chancellor von Müller, the Chief Architect Coudray, and his physician, Dr. Vogel, all men of special gifts, whose various interests provided a wide range of discussion and conversation. In the intimacy of talk with these friends his gifts and idiosyncrasies found their free scope. His versatility of interests and variability of humour amazed all who came into close intercourse with him. "The world will come to believe that there had not been one but many Goethes," wrote Felix Mendelssohn, and Goethe told von Müller that those who held intercourse with him must put up with his occasional rudeness and caprice. His prevailing mood, however, was the mild serenity of age, though he had days of deep depression when he maintained a sombre silence. At other times, he would display all the vivaciousness of youth, pouring forth banter, irony, wild paradox, and occasionally startling his listeners by outbursts of passionate indignation against persons or things that were distasteful to him. The reports of strangers who came to visit him bear testimony to the same variability of temper.<sup>1</sup> Some left him with the impression of

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note what Southey, who was as absorbed a student

his modesty, affability, and genuine kindness of heart, while others found him proud, cold, and self-absorbed. To English-speaking visitors he seems to have shown his best side; Crabb Robinson, Bancroft, Thackeray and others all attest his kindly and courteous demeanour towards them.

It was thus within his own four walls that Goethe lived his life during his closing years. The house, his "monastery," as he liked to call it, was that which Carl August had presented to him in 1789, and in the course of years its interior had become the external expression of its owner's tastes and affinities. To modern eyes it seems a humble habitation for a Minister of State, but in Goethe's day it was regarded as a magnificent abode—a "palace," Jean Paul called it.<sup>1</sup> The entrance, the most imposing part of it and out of proportion to the rest of the building, is by a spacious staircase ("such a staircase!" exclaims Jean Paul), and on the threshold to which it leads is inscribed the word, *Salve*. The public rooms were the hall, the Juno room,—so-called from its most prominent object, a colossal bust of Juno,—the reception-room, and, opposite to it, three smaller apartments. In all of them are art collections which Goethe had gathered in the course of his life and which are a record of his personal preferences—busts of famous men, statuettes, cartoons, etchings, vases, gems, and various other artistic objects. More interesting and more impressive to the student of Goethe are the three private apartments where he lived and worked, for here it is the man and not the connoisseur who

as Goethe and as sensitive to impressions, says of "devastators of the day," as Emerson calls them. "I know very well in what different lights I myself must appear to different people, who see me but once, or whose acquaintance with me is very slight: not a few go away with the notion that they have seen a stiff, cold, reserved, disobliging sort of person; and they judge rightly as far as they see, except that no one should be deemed disobliging merely for taking no pains to make himself agreeable where he feels no inclination to do so." To Grosvenor Bedford, April 1, 1832,

<sup>1</sup> Its interior remains as Goethe left it.



speaks to us. The contrast between the two sets of apartments is startling, and would suggest a remarkable individuality even to one who knew nothing of Goethe. The public apartments are princely, but the three rooms which Goethe occupied are ascetic in their simplicity. Unadorned, ill-lighted, of small dimensions, the study is such a place of work as a poor undergraduate might find comfortless; and the library and bedroom (a mere closet) are equally devoid of any pretensions to comfort or ornament. It was from a deliberate principle, prompted by his own nature, that Goethe chose to live in such Spartan surroundings—a principle which he thus expounded to Eckermann. “Splendid edifices and apartments are for princes and kings. Those who live in them feel at ease and contented and desire nothing further. To my own nature this is quite repugnant. In a splendid abode, like that which I had at Carlsbad, I am at once lazy and inactive. On the contrary, a small residence, like this poor apartment in which we now are, and where a sort of disorderly order—a sort of gipsy-fashion—prevails, suits me exactly. It allows my inner nature full liberty to act, and to create from itself alone!”<sup>1</sup>

We have many descriptions of Goethe's personal appearance in his last years, though they are not all in agreement. An American already quoted, Mr. George H. Calvert, who was in Weimar in 1825, thus describes him. “Goethe's face was oval, with grand harmonious lines, and features large and prominent, hair cut short and grey without baldness, forehead high and roomy, largely developed throughout, and swelling in the upper corners, so as to unite in a fine curve the conspicuous organs of wonder and ideality.” A month later in the same year, Victor Cousin saw him for the second time, and thus records the impression he made on him. “The door of the gallery opened and I saw

<sup>1</sup> Oxenford's translation.

an old man whom I immediately recognized. He wore a coloured cravat, grey trousers, a blue overcoat, with head bare. What a head! spacious, lofty, imposing as that of Jupiter Olympus." In 1829 Crabb Robinson saw him after the lapse of twenty-seven years and was struck by the change in his appearance. "When he invites a stranger," he writes, "it is *tête-à-tête*. A wise sparing of his strength is his habit. Twenty-seven years ago when I was introduced to him with others I trembled before the imposing dignity of his presence, 'the eye like Jove to threaten or command.' Now I beheld the same eye, indeed, but the eyebrows were become thin, the cheeks were furrowed;<sup>1</sup> the lips no longer curled with fearful compression and the lofty erect posture had shrunk to a gentle stoop." In the following year, Thackeray was in Weimar, and we have from his hand the well-known description of Goethe which he communicated to Lewes. "Of course I remember very well the perturbation of spirit with which, as a lad of nineteen, I received the long-expected intimation that the Herr Geheimrat would see me on such a morning. This notable audience took place in a little ante-chamber off his private apartments, covered all round with antique casts and bas-reliefs. He was habited in a long grey or drab redingot, with a white neckcloth and a red ribbon in his buttonhole. He kept his hands behind his back, just as in Rauch's statuette. His complexion was very bright, clear, and rosy. His eyes extraordinarily dark, piercing, and brilliant. I felt quite afraid before them and recollect comparing them to the eyes of the hero of a certain romance, called *Melmoth the Wanderer*, which used to alarm us boys thirty years ago; eyes of an individual who had made a bargain with a Certain Person, and at an extreme old age retained the eyes in all their awful splendour. I fancied

<sup>1</sup> All who saw Goethe in his last years were struck by the deep furrows in his face.

Goethe must have been still more handsome as an old man than even in the days of his youth. His voice was very rich and sweet. He asked me questions about myself which I answered as best I could. I recollect I was at first astonished, and then somewhat relieved, when I found he spoke French not with a good accent.”<sup>1</sup>

In the management of his life, as he himself tells us, Goethe had inherited the methodical habits of his father. When on his journeys, he went over the day's expenses with his servant before retiring for the night, and at home the household accounts were kept with scrupulous care. He was relieved of this trouble by his son, but after August's death he had to take up the burden again, and he found it onerous. His day, especially in his later years, was laid out after a fixed plan. He rose early, and thus, in Scott's phrase, broke the neck of the day's work. About eight o'clock or earlier came his amanuensis, who had difficulty in keeping pace with his rapid dictation. Once he had been capable of prodigious spells of continuous work at any period of the day, but in his last years creative effort was possible to him only in the morning after he had been refreshed by sleep; and in 1828 he told Eckermann that a page of the Second Part of *Faust* was all that he could produce at one time. In the afternoon came dinner, when he was seldom without a more or less numerous company. He kept a liberal table and, by all accounts, was himself a mighty trencherman and drank correspondingly of his favourite wines, in which he was a connoisseur. When guests were present, the meal was prolonged, and, if the company was choice, it was then that he came out in his full strength, dazzling and overpowering his listeners by the range of his knowledge and gifts and by his dominating personality. In the

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart, who had visited Goethe, remarked to Scott, “how much any one must be struck with the majestic beauty of Goethe's countenance, the noblest certainly by far that I have ever yet seen.”



evenings there were frequent tea-parties, at which his daughter-in-law presided—ladies being the chief guests, music and light talk the entertainment. At nine o'clock Goethe retired, and, when in his ordinary health, was assured of a sound sleep.

It was under the domestic conditions just described that Goethe strove to bring his life's work to a close. The external events of these last years were mainly of such a nature as to admonish him to make all the speed he could. On the night of March 22, 1825, the Weimar theatre which had been rebuilt in 1790 was burnt to the ground—he witnessing the flames from his bed. It was the grave of his memories, he said, and, we may add, memories of mingled pleasure and pain. But Weimar could not dispense with a theatre, and there was a special event to happen in the near future with which it was desirable that its restoration should be associated. On September 3, the jubilee of Carl August's accession to the Dukedom was celebrated. In Goethe, too, the proceedings awakened many recollections, since they commemorated the determination of his own future career. Early in the morning Goethe hastened to the Duke, then living in the Roman House in the Park, and was the first stranger to greet him. Both were deeply moved, and as they embraced, Goethe exclaimed: "To the last breath together." "O for eighteen years of age, and Ilmenau," the Duke was overheard to say, recalling the wild days they had spent there in their early youth. In the evening Goethe's house was brilliantly illuminated, and the day closed with the performance of the opera *Semiramis*.

Two months later (November 7) another jubilee was celebrated—the jubilee of Goethe's coming to Weimar and his entering on office. The demonstration that took place on the part of Court, town, and Duchy gave signal proof of the extraordinary position which he held in the public mind. He was awakened in the morning by a choir of voices



singing a chorale in his garden. At nine o'clock, when he entered the great salon, he was again greeted with music, and there followed a reception of various representative bodies—Ministers of State, deputies from Weimar, Jena (town and University), Eisenach and other places. The representative of the Duke, Baron von Fritsch, presented him with an autograph letter from the Duke and a gold medal, bearing the likeness of the Duke and Duchess on the one side and that of Goethe laurel-crowned on the other. The letter, containing a splendid tribute to Goethe's services, was by the Duke's order posted up in a public place. "Just like him," was Goethe's comment. Later the Duke and Duchess had a long interview with him alone, and they were followed by other members of the ducal family. Other events of the day were a banquet in the town hall at which Goethe was represented by his son, the performance of *Iphigenie*, the whole audience rising and bowing to Goethe when he appeared in the theatre, and a grand serenade before his house by the orchestra of the Ducal chapel. "A most solemn day," was Goethe's comment in his Diary on all that it meant for him.<sup>1</sup>

In January, 1826, Goethe saw the end of a protracted piece of business of high importance for himself and those dependent on him. In 1824 he had resolved to issue a last edition of his collected works, and as soon as his intention was known, many booksellers came forward with offers to undertake the publication. Though at all times generous with his money, Goethe, like Byron, had ever been a hard bargainer with publishers, and in this case he was stiffened by his son August, who, as his own interest was at stake, counselled his father to dealings which smacked of the petty attorney.

<sup>1</sup> The Faculty of Theology in the University of Jena sent him a remarkable address in which it is stated that he "had powerfully advanced the true interests of the Church and of Evangelical theology"!

The publisher Cotta<sup>1</sup> made the most liberal offer, but it was only through the intermediacy of Sulpiz Boisserée that an arrangement was eventually concluded. It was to the effect that Cotta should pay 60,000 thalers for the forty volumes of which the edition was to consist, an additional sum to be paid for the volumes containing the scientific works; and, should 40,000 copies be sold, Cotta undertook to pay 120,000 thalers instead of 60,000. But the bargain was one thing; to reap the fruits of it another. In Germany at that period, authors and publishers were at the mercy of piratical adventurers, and Goethe had been their victim throughout his whole literary career. As so much was involved in the publication of what was to be his last edition of his works, he took a decided step; he appealed in 1825 to the *Bundesrath* for the protection of his copyright, and in the following year the appeal was granted. The preparation of the new edition was one of his important labours during the closing years of his working life, and, with the indispensable aid of Eckermann and Meyer, he completed it in 1830.

Many and strange memories must have been stirred in Goethe when on January 6, 1827, Frau von Stein died in her eighty-fifth year. They had for many years been on terms of friendly intercourse, especially after the death of Christiane Vulpius, for whom she never overcame her dislike. In lines he addressed to her in 1820, he freely acknowledged all that she had been to him, naming her with Shakespeare as one of the greatest influences of his life.

Einer Einzigen angehören,  
 Einen Einzigen verehren,  
 Wie vereint es Herz und Sinn!  
 Lida! Glück der nächsten Nähe,  
 William! Stern der schönsten Höhe,  
 Euch verdank' ich, was ich bin;  
 Tag' und Jahre sind verschwunden,  
 Und doch ruht auf jenen Stunden  
 Meines Wertes Vollgewinn.

<sup>1</sup> Cotta had already published several of Goethe's works.

A touching wish which she expressed when near the end reveals that her last thoughts of him were kind. She, who knew his whole nature as perhaps no one else did, was familiar with his inborn dislike of every suggestion of mortality, and requested that her funeral should not pass his door—a request which the authorities overruled. He did not himself attend the ceremony,<sup>1</sup> sending his son as his representative<sup>2</sup>; and it is wholly characteristic of him that neither in his Diary, letters, nor conversation did he once refer to her death.

A greater loss awaited him in the following year (1828); on June 14 the Grand Duke died suddenly from an apoplectic stroke. He had been in failing health for some time, but, against the wishes of his friends, he had gone to Berlin to see a great-grandchild, and he died on the journey home. When the news of his death reached Weimar, Goethe was at dinner with a party of guests, and his son was summoned out and informed of what had happened. Hastily dismissing the party on the pretext that they wished to be early at the theatre, he communicated the news to his father when all had gone. In the evening Eekermann visited Goethe and found him walking up and down his room sighing deeply and talking to himself. He had counted on going first, he said to Eekermann, but no doubt all was for the best, and all that poor mortals could do was to go on and endure as best they can. When Schiller died, Goethe said that with him went half of his existence; with even greater truth he might have said the same on the death of the Duke. The life-work of the one was the complement of the life-work of the other, and, on the part of both, there was a clear recognition that such had been the destiny assigned to them.

<sup>1</sup> The exact spot where she was buried is not known, as a road, afterwards constructed, runs over it.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Fitzgerald had a similar objection to attending the funerals of his friends.



Had they not met when they did, Goethe's life must have been passed under such different conditions that he could hardly have developed into the man the world knows. The bond that united them was certainly one of the most remarkable in the history of human relations, and is in itself a testimony to a loyalty of nature in both. In the years of their headstrong youth, when the world at large was convinced that the one was leading the other to ruin, they discerned their respective capacities and under mutual influence they came, as the years proceeded, to shape their lives in accordance with their conditions and with their natural endowments; Carl August grew into a beneficent and enlightened ruler of his people, and Goethe into a world poet and one of humanity's enduring counsellors.

The death of the Duke was the heaviest blow that Goethe had ever sustained, and all the instincts of his nature were required to surmount it. What his dominant instinct was, his whole past life had shown; it was to give to the world all that nature's endowment to him enabled him to give. He followed the same mental and moral regimen as was his custom in all such crises of his life. He repressed every manifestation of emotion, and steadfastly turned to the tasks that had been occupying him. A rising artist, J. Stieler, had for some time been engaged on his portrait, and he continued to sit for him; science had long been his refuge in times of mental trouble and he now read a work of the botanist De Candolle in connection with a French translation of his *Metamorphosis of Plants* which was being prepared by Soret. But his medical adviser insisted that a change of scene was necessary if nature was not to give way. The Duke's burial was to take place on July 9, and on the 7th Goethe left Weimar, accompanied by his manservant and his secretary.

The place he chose for retreat was Dornburg, a village in the valley of the Saale, a little below



Jena. It was a spot, he told Zelter, which for fifty years he had enjoyed in the company of the Duke, and where he saw around him the most striking evidences of his old patron's beneficent activity. Of all Goethe's places of retreat it is indeed the most delightful. In front of the village is a row of castles of various dimensions, extending along a ridge, overlooking the Saale valley, a splendid prospect. What specially appealed to the poet was the highly-cultivated gardens adjoining the castles where he had excellent opportunities of prosecuting his botanical researches. Spending the whole day in the open air engaged in these pursuits, he gradually attained serenity, though, as he wrote to Zelter, the gloomy catafalque was ever in the background. Two short poems which he wrote during his stay at Dornburg give the keynote of the mood produced in him by the Duke's death. One of them, *Dem aufgehenden Vollmonde*, is addressed to Marianne von Willemer.<sup>1</sup>

Willst du mich so gleich verlassen ?  
Warst im Augenblick so nah !  
Dich umfinstern Wolkenmassen,  
Und nun bist du gar nicht da.

Doch du fühlst, wie ich betrübt bin,  
Blickt dein Rand herauf als Stern !  
Zeugest mir, dass ich geliebt bin,  
Sei das Liebchen noch so fern.

So hinan denn ! hell und heller,  
Reiner Bahn in voller Pracht !  
Schlägt mein Herz auch schmerzlich schneller,  
Ueberselig ist die Nacht.

On September 11 Goethe returned to Weimar, and with recovered strength and composure resumed the tasks that had been interrupted by the Duke's death. But before his life's work was done, he was again to be painfully reminded of his own

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that they made a mutual pledge that they would think of each other at the time of full moon.

saying that to live long is to outlive many. On February 14, 1830, the Grand Duchess Luise followed her husband the Grand Duke. For Goethe it was the breaking of another tie which had endured for over half a century. During his first years in Weimar she had regarded him with suspicion as a mischievous influence on Carl August, but she had come to see that she had misjudged their relations and to consider him as a friend and helper in her own clouded life. Her early misunderstanding with her husband passed away, but they were never wholly congenial to each other, and she impresses us as a noble and somewhat pathetic figure. From the first Goethe was attracted by the distinction of character which lay behind her outward reserve, and which she had so eminently shown in her attitude to Napoleon, and from all his references to her we may gather that he regarded her as of a nature apart from the women who surrounded her.

In the same year (1830) came a crowning blow, and on this occasion he was stricken in his own household. As his son August advanced in years, his vicious hereditary propensities had become more and more apparent and his conduct towards his wife, and even his father, was such as to destroy the peace of the home; at times, to avoid painful scenes, Goethe found it necessary to take his meals alone. At length, in March, 1830, it was arranged that the son should go away for a time and make a prolonged tour in Italy. Italy had restored his father to mental and bodily health when he was in a condition of morbid strain, and, as August had inherited his father's interest in art, there was a hope that it might have a similar influence on him. The staid Eekermann was to be his travelling companion, as likely to be a restraint on him and, at the same time, an intelligent counsellor. On April 22 they set out on their journey and for three months they travelled together. Apparently, however, their relations were painful from the beginning,

and at length they became so intolerable that the two parted company at Genoa (July 25)—Eckermann to make his way home and August to continue his travels. On the very day they parted, August, while proceeding from Genoa to Spezzia, had his collar-bone broken as the result of an accident to the vehicle in which he was travelling. On his recovery he successively visited Carrara, Florence, Leghorn, and Naples, whence he made an excursion to Pompeii and was present at the excavation of a Roman house in which he showed much interest.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his stay in Naples, as his father gathered from his letters, he was in a state of feverish excitement, and in this condition he travelled to Rome in the middle of October. In Rome a few days later he was attacked by scarlet fever which, followed by a paralytic stroke, proved too much for his broken constitution. He died on the 27th, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery by the Pyramid of Cestius, near which lie the remains of Shelley and Keats—a spot, his father wrote to Zelter, which he had longed for in his dreams years before August was born.<sup>2</sup>

Goethe had anxiously followed his son's travels, and had found comfort in his early letters, which seemed to show an eager and intelligent interest in the places he visited. The morbid strain in those written from Naples, however, disquieted him, but he still continued to hope that Rome might, as in his own case, have a beneficial effect. The announcement of August's death did not reach Weimar till November 10. Goethe received it with composure, and to Chancellor von Müller who communicated it, he only remarked, his eyes filling with tears: *Non ignoravi me mortalem genuisse*. A few days later he gave expression to his feelings

<sup>1</sup> The house excavated was called the *Casa di Goethe* in honour of Goethe.

<sup>2</sup> Thorwaldsen, who had a profound admiration for Goethe, designed and erected a memorial on the tomb.



in a memorable letter to Zelter, who a short time before had also lost a son. "*Nemo ante obitum beatus* is a phrase which is famous in the history of the world, but which really means nothing. To be expressed at all clearly, it should run: 'Expect trials to the very end.' You have had your share of them, my friend; so have I, and it seems as if Fate were convinced that we are not knit together of nerves, veins, arteries, and other derived organs, but of wire. . . . In trials like this nothing but the great conception of duty can uphold us. I have no care but to maintain my balance physically; everything else follows spontaneously. It is for the body to obey, for the spirit to will, and the man who finds his will directed into the one inevitable course, will soon make up his mind."

When Goethe thus wrote to Zelter, he had already begun to put these precepts into practice. Immediately after receiving the news of August's death, he had turned to a task which he had laid aside for ten years—his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*,—and had assiduously addressed himself to the completion of the fourth book. But, in spite of will, he found that the body has its limits of endurance. During the night of November 25-6, he was seized with a violent hæmorrhage from the lungs, and for some days his life was in danger. Again his magnificent constitution triumphed and by the middle of December he was able to resume work. As usual, many tasks engaged him. In the beginning of 1831 he occupied himself with the arrangement of his correspondence, and intimated to Eckermann that he would appoint him his literary executor. He resolutely applied himself to the completion of the Second Part of *Faust*, but was again interrupted by a serious illness in March. At length, as we have seen, by the end of June he was able to tell Eckermann that his work was done and that henceforth he considered himself free to dispose of his life as seemed good to him.



It was under these successive blows to his peace of mind that Goethe carried on his manifold labours during the closing years of his working life. Yet these years were far from being years of unmingled gloom. He found in the exercise of his powers the cheerfulness and repose which such effort always brings. In his home, despite his trying experiences with his son, there was much to make his life smooth and happy. His daughter-in-law, Ottilie, was wholly devoted to him, and, with her unusual degree of feminine tact and sympathy, she knew how to minister to all his needs and humours. His two grandchildren, also, were a never-failing source of delight to him. At all periods of his life children had been drawn to him as to one who understood them, and Soret gives a pleasant picture of the liberties which the younger grandson, Wolf, took with him even at inopportune times. Moreover, hardly a day passed without visits from his friends in Weimar, both men and women, and among these were persons fully capable of entering into his various interests, and, what he valued above everything else in talk, of adding to his stores of knowledge.

Another interest was the succession of distinguished visitors who waited on him year by year, inspired either by curiosity or by friendship. Of the former was Heine who came in October, 1824, and has recorded his impression of Goethe with his characteristic *persiflage*. As he chose to tell the story, he had prepared a formal speech for the occasion, but was so overwhelmed by Goethe's manner and presence that he could only stammer out some words about the excellence of the plums that grew between Weimar and Jena. The two most welcome guests were Sulpiz Boisserée and Zelter, both with a place in his affections, the one as a son and the other as a true brother in the spirit. His most astonishing visitor was Alexander von Humboldt, who rivalled Goethe himself in the

extent of his knowledge and the universality of his interests, and whose talk was an unremitting stream, which in later years overwhelmed the *salons* of Paris. Goethe's attitude towards another visitor of a different order disquiets us. This was the well-meaning, but foolish King of Bavaria, Ludwig I., who was an enthusiastic admirer. He called with Carl August to present Goethe with the Order of the Grand Cross. Always a stickler for etiquette, Goethe turned to the Duke and asked his permission to accept the honour. "Come, old fellow, no nonsense," was the Duke's characteristic reply. Two days later von Müller met Goethe who spoke to him as follows of his interview with the King. "It is no trifle to assimilate an impression so powerful as the vision of the King, to adjust it mentally. It requires an effort, in such circumstances, to stand upright, and not to get giddy. And yet it is a matter of moment to familiarize oneself with the vision, to form a clear and distinct idea of what is important in it." As we read these humourless reflections, if we are to do justice to Goethe, we have need to recall what corporatism means in Germany, and that Goethe had breathed the atmosphere of German Courts for a lifetime.

Even during these years of enforced seclusion Goethe never ceased to be in touch with the world outside Weimar. At his own request, he was regularly informed by his many correspondents of their pursuits in their various domains, whether in literature or in science; Zelter, the most valued of them, had to keep him abreast of all that was doing in the musical, theatrical, and literary circles of Berlin. His conversations with Eckermann furnish remarkable evidence of his eager curiosity in the different fields of human activity even into his latest years. Few works in literature produced in any of the intellectual centres of Europe escaped his attention. It was the new literary movements

in France that interested him most, for he always considered that the French were the people that had attained the highest degree of national culture. The foundation of the *Globe* in 1824, as an organ of the new generation of French men of letters, he hailed as evidence of France's widening intellectual horizon. He read diligently her leading young writers—Guizot, Villemain, Cousin, Rémusat, Ste. Beuve and others. The ironical quality of Prosper Mérimée, whom he called *ein ganzer Kerl*, specially interested him, and it is a signal instance of his critical insight that he was almost alone in detecting that Mérimée's *Guzla*, given out as a collection of Illyrian songs, was a mystification. He fully recognized Victor Hugo's genius, and made it a duty to read his successive productions, but it was a painful experience. Hugo's morbid exaggeration was antipathetic to his deepest instincts, and he described *Notre Dame* as "the most detestable book ever written."

Goethe's outlook was not limited to the moral and intellectual development of humanity; he had visions of material development on the globe which have since his day been in great measure realized. He felt assured that the United States, by its rapid growth towards the west, would one day be forced to construct a canal which would open up the Pacific to the world's trade;<sup>1</sup> he desired, in the interests of all nations to see a canal cut through the Isthmus of Suez and in the possession of Britain, as he also desired to see a canal uniting the Danube and the Rhine in the interests of Central Europe. But it was in the progress of what he considered right conceptions of the processes of nature that he was most keenly interested, as on these conceptions depended man's true attitude to the universe. There is a well-known anecdote told by Soret, which illustrates in a remarkable manner his absorption in his scientific ideas. On August 2, 1830, the news

<sup>1</sup> Leibniz anticipated him in this forecast.



of the Revolution of July in Paris reached Weimar, and there was general excitement regarding its probable results. In the afternoon of that day Soret visited Goethe, and the following conversation, probably somewhat coloured in the report, ensued between them. "Now," exclaimed Goethe as Soret entered, "what do you think of this great event? The volcano is in eruption, everything is in flames, and the day of secret discussion is over." "A frightful story," returned Soret. "But in the circumstances with which we are familiar, and with such a ministry, what else was to be expected than that the expulsion of the royal family would ultimately come?" "We appear to be at cross-purposes, my good friend," returned Goethe. "I am not speaking of these people; I am concerned with very different matters. I am talking of the dispute between Cuvier and Geoffrey St. Hilaire, which has broken out publicly in the Academy—a dispute of the highest importance for science." And he proceeded to explain how for fifty years he had been insisting on the synthetic as against the analytic mode of regarding nature, the very cause which St. Hilaire was now championing before the world against Cuvier. As Soret relates the anecdote, surprise is implied that Goethe should be so indifferent to an event of such political significance for the world as the Revolution of July. But the truth is that the anecdote brings before us the fact that for Goethe the issue of the controversy between Cuvier and St. Hilaire was of profound and permanent import for the future of humanity; the question at stake was for him, whether truth or error, and therefore whether good or evil, was eventually to triumph. The animating principle of all his thinking on art, philosophy, and religion was the conception of nature for which St. Hilaire contended. In his concluding remarks to Soret on the same occasion there is the fervour of religious conviction. "From the present time," he said,



“mind will rule over matter in the physical investigations of the French. There will be glimpses of the great maxims of creation, of the mysterious workshop of God! Besides, what is all intercourse with nature, if, by the analytical method, we merely occupy ourselves with individual material parts, and do not feel the breath of the spirit, which prescribes to every part its direction, and orders, or sanctions, every deviation by means of an inherent law?”

The most important works on which Goethe was engaged during his closing years have already been mentioned, but these do not include the whole scope of his activities in literature and science. He prepared for publication his correspondence with Schiller and with Zelter, continued his *Annalen*, and wrote various essays on foreign literatures and on scientific subjects. Apart from his work on the Second Part of *Faust* he produced comparatively little poetry—the inevitable result of flagging inspiration. The poems he wrote at Dornburg, charged with the memories of Carl August, have already been named, and besides these we have between thirty and forty short pieces prompted by experiences of the moment. Memorable among them is the poem on Schiller's skull, which had been found among others in the treasury-vault at the Jacobskirchhof in Weimar<sup>1</sup> (1826). That Goethe chose to write a poem on such a subject is in itself remarkable, for it was a peculiarity of his later years that he avoided with morbid care all direct references to death.<sup>2</sup> As it happened, at the time when the poem was written, he was engaged in the study of Dante, and it is wholly in Dante's spirit and at the same time in consistency with his own scientific creed that he transcends considerations of mortality in the treatment of his theme. Written in Dante's

<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful if it was really Schiller's skull.

<sup>2</sup> In his later years he made use of all manner of euphemism to avoid the word “death.”

*terza rima* and with something of his tense compression, the poem thus concludes :—

Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen,  
 Als dass sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare ?  
 Wie sie das Feste lässt zu Geist verrinnen,  
 Wie sie das Geist-erzeugte fest bewahre.

Interesting, also, is the series of lyrics which he entitled *Chinesisch- Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, written in 1827. At an earlier period, we have seen, he had given his attention to Chinese literature, and some recent translations from the Chinese had reawakened his curiosity. He had learned from Herder to realize how poetic feeling found expression among the various races of mankind, and by imitations to endeavour to reproduce in himself their imaginative attitude. The peculiar quality of Chinese poetry, as it has come to be known, is its letting the simple fact speak for itself, and in such lines as the following Goethe closely and with fine effect follows his models.

Dämm'ung senkte sich von oben,  
 Schon ist alle Nähe fern ;  
 Doch zuerst emporgehoben  
 Holden Lichts der Abendstern !  
 Alles schwankt ins Ungewisse,  
 Nebel schleichen in die Höh' ;  
 Schwarzvertiefte Finsternisse  
 Widerspiegelnd ruht der See.

But the weightiest poem of the period is that entitled *Vermächtniss*, composed in 1829 and subsequently embodied in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Here in brief compass we have Goethe's philosophy of life as it had definitively shaped itself in his mind as the result of all his previous experience. And, as his final testimony, it has greater impressiveness from the fact that it is an emphatic reply to a misconception of previous words of his own.

His poem *Eins und Alles* had ended with the lines :

Denn alles muss in Nichts zerfallen,  
Wenn es im Sein beharren will.

Mistakenly read apart from their context, these lines, to Goethe's indignation, had been taken to imply the annihilation of the individual. *Ver-mächtniss* opens with an emphatic contradiction of this inference.

Kein Wesen kann zu nichts zerfallen !  
Das Ew'ge regt sich fort in Allen.  
Am Sein erhalte dich beglückt !  
Das Sein ist ewig ; denn Gesetze  
Bewahren die lebend'gen Schätze,  
Aus welchen sich das All geschmückt.

A peculiarly characteristic section of Goethe's work belongs for the most part to his closing years ; this is a series of gnostic sentences sufficiently numerous to make up a volume by themselves. Many and varied as were the works in prose and verse which he had given to the world, there was in his mind an overflow of reflections on all the subjects that interested him, for which he had not been able to find a place. With advancing years the habit of meditating on all the experience that life presented to him, and condensing in aphoristic form the results of his thinking, became the prevailing tendency among his mental activities. It first appears in a marked degree after he had passed middle age ; we have the evidences of it in his *Epigrams*, in the *Xenien*, and in the *Weissagungen des Bakis*. At first his reflections found expression for the most part in the form of the distich, but at a later period he was content to set them down in plain prose. Such are the maxims that appear in the diary of Ottilie in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), where they are so strangely out of place, and in the *Farbenlehre* (1810). The crop of them grew steadily from year to year, and the most

abundant harvest was brought forth in the last decade of his life. He put many of them to a singular use; regardless of all artistic propriety, he emptied them into *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* simply to extend that work to its desired length. But he was unwilling that any of his words should be lost to the world, and he gave instructions to Eckermann that the remaining maxims should be published under three heads according to their subjects. With the subsequent additions that have been made to them they number over twelve hundred.<sup>1</sup>

We have many similar collections of maxims and observations by men of the world, by men of action and by pure thinkers, but for range, depth and suggestiveness, none of these are comparable to those of Goethe. Of all men he, perhaps, lived the fullest life of intellect, soul and sense; there was virtually no field of human experience that was closed to him. He had sounded the depths of human passion and climbed the highest heights of thought; his powers of mind combined in unique degree imagination and the faculties of observation and reflection; to man, nature, and art he had given equal attention, and the opportunities of his life had afforded him the amplest scope for his all-inquiring scrutiny. What distinguishes the mass of observations he has left behind him, therefore, is the extent of human knowledge and experience they cover. As we should expect from all his life's striving, they are characterized by a perfect sincerity; they never aim at effect; it is seldom that they take an epigrammatic form; their one object is to state as briefly as possible all the truth that occurs to the writer's mind regarding the subject which is

<sup>1</sup> Loeper, in his valuable edition, entitled the collection *Sprüche in Prosa*, but Reimer and Eckermann, who first gave them to the world, chose the title *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Mr. Bailey Saunders has given a translation of most of them in his *Maxims and Reflections of Goethe* (1893) with an interesting Introduction.



interesting him. Taken as a whole, the maxims form for the world a permanent treasury of wise suggestion in the various domains of human activity. And the world has made ample use of them; wherever there is strenuous thinking, their words are quoted as the weightiest that can be adduced on the subject under consideration.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT—WILHELM MEISTER

ONE of the tasks that occupied Goethe's closing years of work was the completion of his Autobiography—*Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Like so many of his other books it had been long on the anvil; the idea of writing it, indeed, had first come to him as far back as August, 1808. What immediately prompted him to the undertaking was the preparation of the materials for Hackert's autobiography which had been entrusted to him for publication.<sup>1</sup> But there were other reasons that induced him to think that the narrative would be an acceptable gift to the world. The first complete edition of his works was in the course of publication (1806–1810), and there was a desire on the part of his readers for some commentary that would present them in their organic connection. This desire he was anxious to meet and, moreover, it appealed to a predisposition of his own. He had always been keenly interested in the biographies of other men, and had found equal profit and pleasure in them. He had himself translated Benvenuto Cellini, and he had given to the world the lives of Winckelman and Hackert. As we know, too, he was fully aware of the importance of his own life's achievement, and convinced that a history of the mind that produced it would not be uninteresting or unprofitable.

The attempt to give a satisfactory account of his writings by merely arranging them in chronological

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 574.

order and by annotations, which was what his friends suggested, he found, for various reasons, impracticable. He felt that only by a general survey of his life could he present an adequate interpretation of the essential characteristics of his works, and of the conditions that had prompted and determined them. The title he chose, *Aus meinem Leben ; Dichtung und Wahrheit*,<sup>1</sup> expresses his conception of the treatment by which his object could be most effectively attained. It was not to be a detailed and consecutive story of his life as a whole, but the fruit of a selective process which would present in relief such incidents and experiences as had most directly and potently influenced his character and his genius. The precise import of the words, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, he has himself been careful to explain. "I called it *Dichtung und Wahrheit*," he told Eckermann, "because it raises itself by higher tendencies from the region of a lower Reality"; and he further declared to Eckermann that the book contained merely results from his life and that the facts it related served only "to confirm a general observation, a higher truth." In a letter to Zelter he explained at greater length what he exactly meant by "poetry and truth," and the passage may be quoted as serving to show what we are to look for in the book.

"As to the title of my life's confidences—*Wahrheit und Dichtung*—which is certainly somewhat paradoxical, I adopted it because my experience is that the public always entertains some doubt as to the truthfulness of such biographical efforts. To meet this, I acknowledge to have written a kind of fiction; driven to it, to some extent unnecessarily, by a certain spirit of contradiction. For it was my most

<sup>1</sup> *Dichtung und Wahrheit* was the sub-title of the editions of the first three Parts which appeared in Goethe's lifetime, as for euphonic reasons he preferred it to *Wahrheit und Dichtung*. In the editions published after his death by Riemer and Eckermann, the latter title was substituted. In Loeper's edition (1876) the original title was restored, and subsequent editions have followed the precedent.

earnest endeavour, as far as possible, to represent and express the genuine, fundamental truth, which, as far as I could see into it, had prevailed throughout my life. But if such a thing is not possible in later years without the co-operation of memory and, therefore, of the imaginative faculty, so that, in one way or other, we never fail to exercise the poetic gift, then it is clear that we shall present and bring into relief the *results* and the past as it seems to us *now*, rather than the individual events, as they happened *then*. For does not the most ordinary chronicle necessarily embody something of the spirit of the time in which it was written? . . . Under the word *Dichtung* I comprised all that belongs to the narrator and the narrative, so that I could make use of the truth of which I was conscious for my own ends.”<sup>1</sup>

As to the actual facts of his past Goethe used every endeavour to inform himself accurately, but the materials at his disposal left much to be desired. His mother, who could have supplied him with full information concerning his youthful years in Frankfort, was dead before the thought of undertaking the work had occurred to him,<sup>2</sup> and he had to be satisfied with such fragmentary communications as Bettina had received from her.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as we know, in 1807 he had burned all the letters that had been addressed to him, so that in 1811, when he began to write, he had neither originals nor copies of most of the letters which he had written to others. It was mainly, therefore, on his own memories and the memories of such relatives and friends as were still living that he had to rely for his narrative, supplemented to a certain extent by

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Coleridge's translation.

<sup>2</sup> His mother died in August, 1808, the year when the idea of writing his Autobiography first occurred to him.

<sup>3</sup> In writing to Bettina for information regarding his youthful days, he tells her that he does not know whether the book will turn out a history or a romance.



what he himself and others had published during the periods of his life which he had to treat.

With this conception in his mind, he drafted a preliminary sketch of his Autobiography in October, 1809, but it was not till January, 1811, that he began its composition in the form in which we have it. So assiduously did he address himself to his task that in the course of that year he finished and published Part I., comprising the first five Books. In these Books, which deal with his boyhood in Frankfort, there is more of *Dichtung* than in any of those that follow ; even conversations being recorded as if from *verbatim* reports. In the following year Part II. (Books VI.-X.) appeared, containing the narrative of his Leipzig and Strassburg days ; and in 1814, Part III. (Books XI.-XV.), which brings the story down to the period immediately preceding his relations with Lili Schönemann. There followed a long interval during which the work was virtually laid aside. It was not till November, 1830, that he seriously resumed it. By October, 1831, he had completed Part IV. (Books XVI.-XX.), which concluded the narrative of his life he deemed fitting to give to the world.<sup>1</sup> Of all the portions of the work this last Part is the most fragmentary and disjointed ; it bears visible marks of haste or embarrassment. His relations with Lili are its main theme, and it conducts us to the eve of his settlement in Weimar. Out of a life of eighty-two years, therefore, we have in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* the story of only twenty-six.

As with almost all Goethe's longer works, opinion has been divided on the merits and value of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* since the day of its appearance. In Germany it confirmed the opinion of those who regarded him as an "immoral egoist"—an opinion that still widely prevails in that country. The story of his relations with Friederike shocked men like Niebuhr, and more than any other incident in

<sup>1</sup> Part IV. was published by Eckermann in 1833.

his life has discredited him in his own and other countries. On the other hand, there has always been a minority of his countrymen who have regarded the book as one of Germany's national possessions, to which no other country can show anything comparable. At the time of its appearance it was slightly received both in France and in England. Madame de Staël, who had an appreciative admiration of Goethe's genius, had no high opinion of it, and it was satirically reviewed in the Paris journals. In the *Edinburgh Review* De Quincey wrote an amusing notice of the first three Parts, in which he speaks of its "puerile vanity and affectation," and its "interminable prolixity in trifling matters," but admits that "it is not by any means unentertaining."

Apart from ethical considerations, opinion has been divided regarding its value as a piece of autobiography. Our estimate of the book will be determined by what we look for in it; if we expect a vivid presentment of Goethe in the successive stages of his boyhood and youth, it must be admitted that we do not find it. It has been said of St. Augustine that, when he wrote his *Confessions*, he was "in the torrent, not watching it from the shore." It is otherwise with Goethe and his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; as one of his most enthusiastic editors<sup>1</sup> has expressed it, for Goethe "the campaign was over, his wounds cicatrized," when he sat down to write it. Of the distracted youth in his Leipzig days, whose passions and excesses resulted in moral and physical collapse, the Autobiography gives us but a faint picture. He says of his experiences in Wetzlar with Lotte Buff and her betrothed, Kestner, that they were of "no great significance," yet his correspondence of the time would lead us to believe that they were of such a nature as to upset his mental and moral balance, which he only recovered by discharging his morbid emotions in

<sup>1</sup> G. von Loeper.

*Werther*. Readers, disappointed in what they expect to find in an autobiography, will judge the book as a whole unfavourably. It appears to them a schematized work, in which the author, in accordance with a preconceived theory, has arbitrarily selected certain incidents of his life and interpreted them in consistency with that theory. Such digressions as those on the Bible history, the coronation of the Emperors, the Imperial Court of Justice, the state of German literature, may be interesting in themselves, but they come between us and the passionate youth whose idiosyncrasies it is our primary wish to see in their spontaneous working. Instead of being valuable and artistic additions to the work, these digressions are to be regarded as another illustration of the curious weakness of Goethe, especially perceptible in his old age,—his inability to keep out of any work on which he happened to be engaged, irrelevant matter which at the moment was interesting him. It is a frequent remark of Goethe's own that, by the time he began to write his Autobiography, he had come to regard himself as an historical person; and the result is that the character presented in its pages is not the youthful Goethe, but the aged Goethe who intellectualizes all emotions, and diffuses "the pale east of thought" over the ebullient passions of his youth. This was why Lewes refused to accept *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a safe or enlightening guide for the period of Goethe's life which it narrates, and why Henry Sidgwick, so keenly interested in Goethe, was led to say that no one was ever attracted to the hero it depicts.

For other minds it is precisely the fact that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is an artistically conceived and finished work that constitutes its interest and value, and it is this peculiarity that differentiates it from other autobiographies, such as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and of Rousseau. We have Goethe, in the full maturity of his powers, presenting us with



a construction of his life in the most interesting period of his development, as a typical illustration of how the individual acts and reacts on his environment. Such a work, they hold, is of greater value than if Goethe had, so far as was possible to him, sought to reproduce in himself the passions of his youth and to express them with corresponding intensity. In adopting this method of treating himself as an historical person, he was free to reflect on all that he had felt and seen and done, to distinguish what seemed to him material or immaterial in his life's experience, and so to present it as a rational unity. His deliberate reflections on his past thus convey more instruction than a vivid resuscitation of it would have done. Goethe, Emerson says, saw himself as a third person and "his faults and delusions interest him equally with his successes"; and this was characteristic of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in which Emerson found its originality. Whatever may be our individual impressions of its intrinsic value, it has taken its place in universal literature as one of the most remarkable transcripts of human experience.

It is a natural transition from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Every romance, it has been said, is an autobiography, and the remark is peculiarly applicable to Goethe's famous novel. The most important materials of six of the eight Books that compose it are drawn from his own personal experience. And it is not only incidents and events of his own life that he utilizes for artistic purposes; the record of his hero's moral and intellectual development is in great measure a transcript of his own. In other works Goethe gives us a partial portrait of himself; in the Weislingen of *Götz*, in Werther, Clavigo, and Tasso there is manifestly self-portraiture, but it is only the emotional side of his nature that all these characters present. In Meister we have Goethe's counterpart, endowed with a like temperament and



like gifts, inspired with the same ideals, pursuing them by the same paths, and finally arriving at a philosophy of life which was Goethe's own.<sup>1</sup> Apart, therefore, from its general interest as one of the most widely suggestive of imaginative works that have appeared in modern times, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* has a biographical value which makes it an essential supplement to *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

The fortunate discovery of *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung* has cast a clear light on the origins of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.<sup>2</sup> Now we know that the former work was written in Weimar before Goethe's Italian journey, and that its hero was to fulfil his destiny in connection with the stage. Only six Books of the *Sendung* were finished, and the plan of the six Books which were to follow and which we know that Goethe drafted, has not been preserved. He started on his Italian journey in the autumn of 1786, and it was not till 1794 that he seriously resumed the book with the intention of completing it. The manifold experiences through which he had passed in the interval could not but influence his judgment on its original aim and scope. The Italian journey, his breach with Frau von Stein, his domestic arrangement with Christiane Vulpius, his personal isolation during the years that followed his return from Italy, his absorption in science, the French Revolution: these were events and experiences which profoundly modified his general outlook on men and things. When he now addressed himself to the completion of the *Theatralische Sendung*, therefore, it is not surprising that the original plan no longer satisfied him, and that there presented itself to his extended interests and outlook a larger conception which should give the completed whole a higher and wider significance and value.

<sup>1</sup> At one time Goethe called Wilhelm his "geliebtes dramatisches Ebenbild"; at another he was to him "ein armer Hund."

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 568.

As usual, it was external pressure that occasioned his resuming work on the *Sendung*. In 1792 an edition of his *Neue Schriften* had been begun, and he came under a promise to his publisher Unger to enrich it with the addition of his unfinished novel, which he undertook to complete. By a fortunate chance the year (1794) in which he began his task was the year in which he entered on his stimulating association with Schiller. It is, indeed, an interesting circumstance connected with the production of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* that both their minds were at work upon it. But for Schiller, Goethe frankly admits, the book would never have been finished. As the work proceeded, it was regularly submitted to Schiller, whose criticisms and suggestions, not always accepted and not always happy, gave the stimulus which was invariably necessary to Goethe in the case of his longer productions.

With his new conception of the governing idea of his work, Goethe had a difficulty to face in his dealing with the unfinished *Sendung*. In the original plan of this work the career of its hero was to be that of a youth finding the fulfilment of his destiny, first as an actor, then as manager of a theatre which was to exalt the stage into an agency of national education—Goethe's own aspiration when he wrote the book. That plan abandoned, the *Sendung* could not be taken over as it stood. Goethe has himself explained his procedure with it; he was only its editor, he told Schiller. In consistency with this attitude he shortened the original by a third, deleted some passages, transposed and rewrote others. In spite of these alterations and adaptations, however, he himself admits that he could not entirely get rid of the early treatment, and the result was seriously detrimental to the transformed work. Long passages which had their appropriate place in the *Sendung* are irrelevant and distracting in the *Lehrjahre*. This is notably apparent in the disproportionate

attention given to the theatre and the drama, which, as Schiller pointed out, would at times give the impression that the book was written for actors and not for the general reader. The adaptation of the earlier work and the composition of two additional Books occupied Goethe during three years (1794-6); the first volume was published in 1794, the second in 1795, and the fourth and last in 1796, and it is to be noted that the first volume bore the title, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, an indication of the altered plan.

The first Book of the *Lehrjahre* hardly suggests a different motive from that of the *Sendung*. We are in the same world, and we have the same leading characters in similar relations and with like idiosyncrasies. Only in the sequence of events do we find any important change on the original draft. The book opens with a scene which might raise the expectation of an ordinary sensational novel. Mariane, a pretty actress, is in the predicament of having two lovers between whose claims she has to decide. The one is Norberg, a rich merchant, who at the moment happens to be on a business journey; the other is Wilhelm Meister, the son of a merchant, resident in the town. Left to herself, Mariane would have had no difficulty in choosing between the rivals; her relations to Norberg were a mere convenient arrangement, but to Wilhelm she had given her heart. At her side, however, she has an attendant, Barbara, an aged crone, who takes a business view of the two claimants. While Norberg is rich and generous, Wilhelm is impecunious, and, in Barbara's opinion, only "a soft-hearted, callow merchant's son." She urges Mariane, therefore, to throw over Wilhelm and make sure of Norberg who is in a position to maintain them both in easy circumstances. But Mariane, though of a yielding disposition, is not a Manon Lescaut and is capable of devotion to a penniless lover. At the risk of losing Norberg she gives herself to Wilhelm,



who, on his part, regards her as the impersonation of all that his soul and mind desire. For we soon discover that he is no ordinary lover. Before he met Mariane, he was possessed with a passion for theatrical representations which made work-a-day life increasingly flat and irksome. A constant attender of the theatre, when he saw Mariane in her various parts as a member of a travelling troupe, he felt that the dream of his life was realized. His fate linked with hers, love and inspiration would be one impulse, and together they would fulfil the destiny which he was assured had been allotted to him.

The scenes that follow are an interesting commentary on the workings of Goethe's own mind. In seven successive chapters Wilhelm expounds to Mariane the origin and growth of his interest in the stage. Here we have a transcript from Goethe's own experience; for Wilhelm, like himself, dated his interest in theatrical representations from a puppet-show which had amused his childhood. Producing his puppets before Mariane and Barbara, he exhibits their performances with an accompanying commentary on his associations with them. With a consciousness that he is giving way to his own predilections and ignoring his readers, Goethe makes Mariane fall asleep during the dissertation—a natural enough result, most readers admit. These chapters are, indeed, only another illustration of Goethe's inability to withhold from a work of art what happens to interest himself, however inappropriate to its primary purpose.

Wilhelm's dissertation finished, the narrative begins to move. If Mariane has her difficulties, Wilhelm also has his. There are three persons interested in his career—his father, his father's partner in business, Werner, and Werner's son. All of them are practically minded persons, and regard with equal disapproval his dislike of business and his fantastic notions generally. The two fathers



take counsel, and, in the hope of his acquiring more wisdom, they send him on a journey connected with the interests of their firm. What befell him on his travels would have cured him of his theatrical dreams, had these not been compact with his deepest nature. The one notable incident of his journey is his meeting with an actor who has run off with a respectable citizen's daughter to the scandal of the community. Wilhelm, who is a veritable Don Quixote in the generosity of his impulses, succeeds in reconciling the pair with the woman's parents. The squalor of the whole affair disgusts him, and his feelings are still more revolted by the manner in which the actor, to whom he has done such a kind office, denounces his own profession as the most contemptible of occupations. In consistency with his idealism Wilhelm sets this down as the miserable prejudice of one who has no divine calling to his art, and he returns home as enthusiastic as ever for Mariane and the ideals she embodies. He resolves to take the decisive step which will determine his destiny; he writes a passionate letter to her in which he offers her his hand; announces his intention of leaving his home and seeking an engagement with a theatrical manager of his acquaintance; and pictures the glorious future before them, when in their respective parts they will show to the world what an agency the stage may be made for the uplifting of humanity. With the letter in his pocket he makes one of his nightly visits to Mariane, but, finding her indisposed, he does not deliver it; and in a state of exaltation wanders about the streets in the darkness, as Goethe himself had done in the distracted days before he left Frankfort and finally parted from Lili Schönemann. But the fabric of Wilhelm's dream was to be woefully shattered. In the course of his night-wandering he saw a figure issue from Mariane's residence, and the suspicion raised by this incident became a certainty, when in the same hour he read a letter that fell from a

neckerchief of Mariane's which he had carried off as a love-token. Stunned by his discovery, he breaks down in body and mind, and at the close of the first Book we leave him a mental and moral wreck.

When the second Book opens, three years have elapsed, and, in the interval, Wilhelm, disillusioned by the faithlessness of his mistress and with his confidence in his gifts destroyed, applied himself to the routine of business with such assiduity and success that his father and Werner determined to send him on another commercial journey with the express commission of collecting the debts due to their firm. In the way in which Wilhelm carried out his commission we are reminded of a passage in Goethe's own life. When his father sent him to the University of Leipzig, it was on the understanding that he should devote himself to the study of law, but Goethe confided to his sister Cornelia that he had no such intention and that he meant to follow his own bent, which he certainly did. Wilhelm does not proceed far on his journey before his commission becomes a subsidiary consideration. Wherever he goes, he happens to stumble across actors or persons interested in acting. In the first village he comes to, a solitary mountain spot, he witnesses a dramatic performance enacted by the workmen connected with a manufactory. Leaving this place, he descends into the level country, and desiring an inviting little town, he resolves to spend a few days there, though he has no business to transact in it. The first sight that greets him is a travelling circus, and in the course of the day he makes acquaintance with the members of a disbanded troupe of actors. His former interest in the stage revives, and, as the days pass, he finds himself among such a motley company that Niebuhr described them as a menagerie. Yet, whether we like them or not, the leading characters among them are so pregnantly characterized that they

are among the imaginative creations we cannot forget.

In painting this strange gallery, it is to be remembered, Goethe was not wholly drawing on his imagination. During his early years in Weimar he had been a member of an amateur troupe which, in its travels about the Duchy, would supply him with incidents and observations of which he doubtless made ample use. The easy morals of the company in which Wilhelm found himself, their characteristics, their coarse play, their petty jealousies had all their counterparts, we may be sure, among the courtier troupe of Weimar. The world in which Goethe chose to place his hero would, indeed, seem expressly fitted to disenchant him with the stage and to dissolve his dream of its ideal possibilities. The ill-conditioned Melina,<sup>1</sup> selfish and self-seeking, the madcap Friedrich, and the cynical Laertes are all naturally repellent to him. Among the women the peevish Madame Melina, without a spark of idealism in her nature, was his perpetual cross. The coquettish Philina, with her total disregard of conventional decencies, treats him as a child and frankly tells him that he is not a man. Only in two of the characters, Mignon and the Harper, do his sympathies find scope, and even they make their appeal to his heart and not to his mind. Among all the company there is not one who intelligently and sympathetically responds to his aspirations after an ennobled stage. To contemporary critics who objected to his having placed his hero among such a crew, Goethe's answer was that, if he had made his characters respectable persons, he would have lost his artistic freedom. And it may be added that in retaining his idealism amid such surroundings Wilhelm gives proof that he was not altogether the weakling which many of his actions would lead us to infer. We may set it down either to his weakness or to his idealism

<sup>1</sup> Melina was the actor whom Wilhelm had met on his first journey.



that, after some hesitation and some qualms of conscience, he yields to Melina's solicitations and supplies him with the means (taken from the debts he has collected) to purchase a theatrical wardrobe and thus to form an acting company. Such are the main incidents of the second Book, in which it is difficult to discover a motive other than that of the *Theatralische Sendung*. But of all the Books of the *Lehrjahre* it is the one which makes the strongest impression of Goethe's creative power. The vivacity of its scenes, the brilliant play of its contrasted characters, and its general spontaneity are, perhaps, unequalled in any other of his imaginative writings.<sup>1</sup>

In the third Book we are introduced to another order of society. A neighbouring Count and Countess are about to receive the visit of a Prince and, to entertain him, they invite Melina's troupe to their castle. Wilhelm has not joined the troupe, but as, like Goethe, he was convinced that only in the class of the nobility could the perfection of external manners be seen, he is desirous of the experience which the opportunity offered, and he resolves to accompany them. The contemptuous manner in which the company is treated throughout their stay at the castle is at least consistent with the conceptions of their profession which are assigned to them. It is to be said, however, that the specimens of the nobility whom Wilhelm meets are not more creditable to their class. The Count and Countess are irresponsible idlers, devoid of serious purpose; a baron, who is among the guests, is a foolish dilettante who writes plays and is interested in the German stage, and his wife finds her chief pleasure in mischievous practical jokes. The most notable experience of Wilhelm at the castle is his intercourse with Jarno, an accomplished man of the world, of cold, clear intelligence, who, as afterwards appears, has a special interest in his career. It is Jarno's

<sup>1</sup> These scenes were taken over from the *Theatralische Sendung*.



part to introduce him to Shakespeare and with a similar result in his case as in that of his creator. The reading of Shakespeare is an epoch in Wilhelm's life as it was in that of Goethe, and, like Goethe, he falls into ecstasies over the marvel of Shakespeare's genius. The discovery of Shakespeare marks an advance in his intellectual development, and a somewhat far-fetched incident during his stay at the castle links his external history with personages who appear at a later stage. The mischievous baroness dresses Wilhelm in the night-robe of the Count, who, entering the room and seeing Wilhelm seated in his easy-chair, takes him for his wraith, with serious consequences both to himself and to the Countess. The last scene of the Book is one of not a few that makes the modern reader uncomfortable. The Countess's heart had been touched by Wilhelm, who is represented as a personable as well as a susceptible youth, and there had been love passages between them, but in this closing scene she gives way to her emotions, and there is a mutual embrace, when she starts up in dismay, "and adds in the most tender and affecting voice: 'Fly, if you love me.'" When we remember the relations of Goethe, also of bourgeois origin, to the Baroness von Stein, we may think it in doubtful taste that he chose to paint this scene.<sup>1</sup>

The outbreak of war compels the dispersion of the guests at the castle and the troupe has to seek employment elsewhere. Wilhelm, intoxicated by his draught of Shakespeare and by the favours of the Countess, is in the highest spirits and confident of his future as the creator of a national theatre. He identifies himself with the troupe; proposes, as an excellent arrangement, that the post of manager should be filled in turn; and is himself the first to be elected. As an outward expression of his inward man, he assumes a fantastical dress, as Goethe donned the Werther costume on his journey to Switzerland

<sup>1</sup> Frau von Stein disliked *Wilhelm Meister* as a whole.

with the Stolbergs. He endeavours to inspire the company with his own ideals of their profession; persuades them to practise rehearsals, and for their edification delivers the famous disquisition on the character of Hamlet. The goal of their journey was a town at a considerable distance, but the possibility of encountering a party of military led them to hesitate regarding the road they were pursuing, and, unfortunately for himself, Wilhelm persuades them not to change their original plan for what was only vague rumour. Following the same route, they are attacked during one of their encampments by a band of armed men, overpowered and robbed. Wilhelm, who had made a gallant fight, is shot down and, when he awakes to consciousness, finds himself in Philina's lap. Just at this moment an incident happens which was to be intimately connected with his future destiny. An elderly gentleman and a young lady, accompanied by a following of horsemen, pass the spot, and give their attention to the wounded man. The young lady, especially, shows a lively sympathy with his condition and before parting begs the old gentleman's overcoat with which she gently covers him. Her beauty and her display of tender feeling overcome him, and thenceforward the fair Amazon, as he designates her, dominates all his thoughts, for he has a vague dream that she was the Countess with whom he had had the remarkable interview at the castle. Removed to an inn in the neighbouring village, where the company were lodged, he is the object of their violent abuse as the cause of their misfortune by persuading them to pursue the road which had led to it. From Philina, also, who had contrived to save her goods by fascinating the despoilers, he is alienated for other reasons, and only the Harper and Mignon remain to him. Despite his ill-treatment by the company, he resolves to prosecute his career as an actor, and with his two companions he proceeds to the town where

his acquaintance, Serlo, is the manager of a theatre.

It was in the fifth Book that Goethe found it necessary to make the most important modifications on the *Theatralische Sendung* in view of the additional Books that were to continue Wilhelm's history. One of the richest and most diversified in its contents, it is full of mysterious incidents which strike the reader as forced and artificial. Serlo is a clever and effective actor, but wanting in soul and unscrupulous in his dealings. He thinks he can make use of Wilhelm, and encourages his enthusiasm. They have much talk about *Hamlet*, and Serlo agrees to put it on the stage, with Wilhelm as the principal character. A difficulty arises about the personation of the ghost, but an anonymous communication assures them that a ghost will be forthcoming, and, when the play is produced, a ghost does appear and represents the part to perfection. On the veil which the mysterious apparition wore in enacting the part, were inscribed the cryptic words, "Fly, youth, fly," and Wilhelm is puzzled by their import, which was subsequently to be unravelled. His own personation of *Hamlet* is a brilliant success, but Serlo becomes convinced that such high-class representations as Wilhelm desired do not appeal to the people, and he cabals with Melina, who, with his troupe, is also in the town, to get rid of Wilhelm.

Wilhelm is aware of the plot, and he makes up his mind to break his connection with Serlo and with the stage—a resolution which is strengthened by a combination of incidents. The Harper becomes deranged, attempts to set the house on fire, and is boarded with a clergyman who has a part to play in Wilhelm's future history. Serlo has a sister, Aurelia, who is all sentiment as her brother is all intellect. She finds a sympathetic soul in Wilhelm, to whom she relates a melancholy history which is another link with his future fortunes. Her tale



is that she had been led astray by a neighbouring nobleman, Lothario by name, who had deserted her and her child Felix. Broken-hearted by his treachery and coarsely treated by her brother, she loses all interest in life and is stricken by mortal illness. To console, if not to cure her, Wilhelm brings a physician, whose acquaintance he has made at the house of the clergyman with whom the Harper is boarded. The physician sees her case is hopeless, but he promises to send her a manuscript which she will read with interest. The manuscript is the *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*, which Goethe thus prepares his reader to expect in the following Book. Aurelia's dying charge to Wilhelm is to seek out her betrayer, and put in his hands the story of her life which will bring home to him what she has suffered by his conduct. The fifth Book closes the first stage of Wilhelm's apprenticeship, and he then enters on another and a final stage, in the presentment of which Goethe develops the new conception of his work.

Wilhelm's history, however, is not immediately continued ; there intervenes one of the most singular productions of Goethe's genius, of which Schiller said that it proceeded less from his own individuality than any other portion of the book. It is the *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*, which the physician had given Aurelia to read on her deathbed. Its contents form a singular contrast to Aurelia's own history, so unhappy in all its relations and darkened by ill-regulated passion and consequent misery. It is the history of a mind, naturally religious, gradually finding its way, amid the distractions of the world, to a mystical repose. Such a representation, Goethe himself says, would have been an impossibility for him, had he not had the opportunity of studying it from nature. The original from whom he drew the portrait was, in fact, his mother's friend, Fräulein von Klettenberg, with whom he himself had been in such affectionate relations in his early youth.



It has been conjectured, indeed, that either the entire narrative or portions of it were from the Fräulein's hand, but the words in which Goethe refers to the *Confessions* in a letter to Schiller seem to imply that it was wholly his own production. However this may be, the story of the Saint's spiritual growth is told with a directness, precision, and artistic fitness which Goethe has surpassed nowhere else. Yet, interesting and beautiful though the narrative is, it cannot but be regarded as an inartistic interpolation, and as another proof that the æsthetic instinct was not the dominating characteristic of his genius. By it he no doubt meant to represent another cultural discipline, in contrast to that which he assigns to Wilhelm, a discipline in which piety is the supreme end; but, as Schiller felt, he has done so at the expense of the integrity of his work as a whole. How Goethe regarded the experiences of the Saint he told Schiller plainly; they were "based upon the noblest of illusions and upon the most delicate confusion between the objective and the subjective." At the close of the narrative itself, a part which was certainly his own, he gently indicates where the pietistic ideal fell short of the perfection which should be man's goal. The Uncle of the Saint—in whom Schiller saw Goethe himself—while showing her his artistic treasures, impresses on her the necessity of cultivating other sides of our nature besides the religious instinct, in the interest of that instinct itself.

In the last three Books of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* Goethe "dispensed with" the *Theatralische Sendung*, but it is specially in the concluding two that we are sensible of the new inspiration. In these we are transported into another world from that of the original six. It is a factitious, artificial world, ingeniously composed, but without actuality. The leading characters who appear in it have little connection with what has gone before,

and most of the persons who have hitherto played important parts, cease to appear—a necessity of Goethe's new conception of Wilhelm's destiny. And the new characters who are introduced are differently created from those of the opening Books. Melina, Laertes, Philina and the others are ordinary beings who talk and act spontaneously from the impulses common to human nature. But the personages whose acquaintance we now make, speak and act on a system. Each of them only embodies an attitude to life, and they act and talk in accordance with it. There is no free, natural speech among them; and their conversations are for the most part edifying discourses. In the opening Books events and incidents happen in a natural way, but in the last two we meet with so many strange developments that we feel we are in an unreal world.

The world into which Wilhelm now enters is, in fact, composed of a number of persons who have devoted themselves to a special mission. It is a secret brotherhood which has for its object the gaining of converts to their own ideal of life. We are to understand that they have had their eyes on Wilhelm from the beginning, and that certain of their number have been specially commissioned to keep watch over him. Mysterious incidents in his past career, such, for instance, as the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet*, had been introduced to indicate that his destiny is an object of interest to agents unknown to himself.<sup>1</sup> Such a machinery seems highly artificial to modern readers, but, when Goethe wrote, there was a widespread interest in secret bodies of the kind. During his first years in Weimar there was a rage for freemasonry, and Goethe himself, the Duke, and many of the courtiers were initiated. A liking for mystification, as we know, was almost a passion with Goethe, and it had an injurious influence on more than one of his most important

<sup>1</sup> These incidents were introduced in the rehandling of the *Theatralische Sendung*.

productions. To the surprising occurrences in the last two Books Schiller objected that there was too much play of fancy in them for such a serious book as *Meister*, and Goethe replied that the fault lay in his inmost nature and that he took delight in "veiling his existence, his actions, and his writings from the eyes of the world."

The leading members of the Society are Lothario, the Abbé, and Jarno. Lothario is the betrayer of Aurelia, and is represented as having had various other amours, but he more than any other of the members of the Society embodies for Wilhelm the ideal of human perfection. He has the charming external manners of the order to which he belongs, and he combines with them a cultivated inwardness of which the ordinary noble had no conception. The Abbé, who had more than once crossed Wilhelm's path in the earlier part of his career, is the most reflective member of the Society, and his talk is of education and of the part played by chance and destiny in the development of the individual. With Jarno we are already acquainted; it was he who, as an agent of the Society, directed Wilhelm to the reading of Shakespeare. As he is depicted, he is the accomplished man of the world, with no interest, as he tells Wilhelm, in art and science, and concerned only with life. In close association with these three men are two women, Therese and Natalie, both of noble rank. Therese is the embodiment of the practical spirit; her one interest is business, and her ideals are order and economy. She has a natural rectitude of mind and all her activities are directed to a beneficent end, but she is devoid of religious instincts and is to be regarded as the antithesis of the "Beautiful Soul." Natalie combines the excellences of both; she is deeply spiritual, but she has also an objectivity of interests which makes her life a record of active well-doing; as Lothario is the ideal of the fully developed man, so Natalie is to be regarded as the



fully developed woman. There is a third female character, Lydia, whom we may take as a foil to Therese and Natalie. Though not of noble birth, she has been one of Lothario's loves, of whom he has wearied ; she is a creature of passion and impulse, and is only introduced because she plays a part in the relations between Lothario and Therese.

The story of the relations of these various characters is so complicated that it is not easy to summarize it. Wilhelm sets out on the errand which Aurelia had enjoined on him—to deliver to Lothario the account of her life. Filled with indignation at Lothario's treatment of her, he resolves to tell him frankly what he thinks of his conduct, but now as ever he is the play of circumstance. When he arrives at Lothario's castle, distracting events and Lothario's personal charm put his intended monition out of his mind, and he finds himself on excellent terms with all whom he meets, the Abbé and Lydia among them. Lydia, who is resident in the castle and has become an embarrassment to Lothario, is dispatched to the home of Therese under the protection of Wilhelm. Therese and Wilhelm have confidential talks, the outcome of which is that they conceive a tender interest in each other. Wilhelm then sets out for the town, where a startling revelation awaits him. Barbara, Aurelia's former maid, the aged crone who had waited on Mariane, makes a startling communication to him ; she tells him that Felix, whom he had supposed to be the son of Lothario and Aurelia, is the son of himself and Mariane, who had been faithful to him till her pitiful death. This discovery effects a profound change in his outlook on life ; now a father, as he puts it, he has become a citizen with the responsibilities of a citizen.

Wilhelm returns to Lothario's castle, and, as the Society is satisfied that he has completed his apprenticeship, he is formally initiated into its membership. He is conducted into a great hall in



the castle, furnished with various symbolical objects, and with attendant mysteries is presented by the Abbé with his Indenture, a brief document, containing the Society's rules for the conduct of life. But a new interest has been awakened in Wilhelm ; as he is now a father, it is necessary that he should find a mother for his son. Therese, we have seen, had touched his heart, and, accordingly, he sends her a letter in which he offers her his hand. He soon finds that he has been over-hasty in his action. Lothario dispatches him with a communication to his sister, and Wilhelm has a vague feeling that this sister is no other than the fair Amazon, who had shown such a tender interest in him when he was wounded and whose image had haunted him ever since. He finds that Natalie is indeed the fair Amazon, and a brief intercourse with her effaces his thoughts of Therese. To add to his embarrassment, while he is still with Natalie, there comes a letter from Therese in which she accepts his offer of marriage. But he is happily extricated from his awkward situation. Therese had been previously engaged to Lothario, but their marriage had been prevented by the discovery of an insurmountable obstacle. Subsequently it is found that this obstacle was a fiction, and in the end Lothario wins Therese, and Wilhelm Natalie. While still with Natalie, Wilhelm has an experience that makes a profound impression on him. The house where Natalie resided had been built by the Uncle who appears in the narrative of the Beautiful Soul, and he had fashioned it within and without so as to give expression to his views on life and art. In the mansion was a chamber, designated the Hall of the Past, in which every object was meant to symbolize the significance and glory of life. Into this chamber Natalie conducts Wilhelm, and the sights he sees there uplift him into wrapt contemplation. Here, he says, life and art dispel all thoughts of death and the grave, and such, we are to infer, was the Uncle's intention.

The most prominent object in the Hall was a marble statue of the builder with a roll in his hand on which were inscribed the words: *Gedenke zu leben*—the sum of Goethe's own philosophy.

As Mignon and the Harper are brought before us in the earlier part of the novel, we are led to expect that they have had strange histories, and we are not disappointed. So painful is that of Mignon and so repulsive that of the Harper that they strike us as alien to Goethe's genius. Mignon is entrusted to Natalie who, by her sympathetic treatment of her, tames her passionate and wayward nature, and imbues her with her own religious sentiments. Mignon dies suddenly from heart disease, and her obsequies are celebrated according to the ceremonial of the Society, which is elaborately described. Her body is embalmed, robed in white, her favourite colour, and the coffin is placed in the Hall of the Past which is adorned in such a manner as to suggest cheerful thoughts. In the presence of the company the last rites are celebrated by two invisible choirs and four boys, dressed in azure with silver, who interchange responses, the burden of which is that life must not be forgotten in the presence of death; and the Abbé speaks a few words regarding the mystery of Mignon's life and its beautiful close. At the conclusion of the ceremony four youths, dressed like the boys, chant the song so well-known from Carlyle's translation. "Well is the treasure laid up; the fair image of the Past! Here sleeps it in marble, undecaying; in your heart, too, it lives, it works. Travel, travel back into life! Take along with you this Holy Earnestness; for earnestness alone makes life eternity."

The mystery of Mignon and the Harper is now revealed. There had just joined the company an Italian nobleman, designated the Marchese, an old friend of the Uncle, whose tastes he had shared. He recognizes, by a mark on her body, that Mignon had been his niece, and he produces a document

which relates the story of the family. From this story it appeared that Mignon was the child of an incestuous union on the part of the Marchese's brother, and that the Harper was the brother, and therefore the father of Mignon. The Marchese departs, and shortly afterwards the Harper appears at the castle. Under the care of the Physician he had seemingly recovered his sanity. It turns out, however, that the recovery is only apparent. One day a false alarm is raised that Felix has innocently poisoned himself by drinking a vial of opium which stood in the room occupied by the Harper, or Augustin as we should now call him. Augustin, who had surreptitiously read his own history in the manuscript of the Marchese, is filled with horror, and his former hallucination that his being was accursed returning, he makes an attempt to cut his throat. The wound is not mortal, and he patiently submits to have it bandaged, but during the night he tears off the bandage, and is found dead in the morning. The story now closes with the cheerful prospect of the marriage of three couples, Lothario and Therese, Jarno and Lydia, and Wilhelm and Natalie.<sup>1</sup> His apprenticeship completed, now a father, and the prospective husband of a woman who realizes all his ideals, Wilhelm is convinced that he is happy beyond his deserts, and he agrees with the words of Natalie's madcap brother Friedrich: "Thou resemblest Saul the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom."

The foregoing summary sufficiently shows that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is not a work of art, in which the parts are organically connected and rightly proportioned in view of a finished whole. As Schiller pointed out, the book wants a centre; we read on and have no sense of an underlying unity; it is not even clearly borne in upon us in

<sup>1</sup> As Friedrich, the brother of Lothario and Natalie, marries Philina, there are thus three marriages of commoners with noble persons—a fact to which Schiller took objection.



what Wilhelm's apprenticeship consists. All through the book we feel that, in writing it, Goethe was alternately influenced by three motives, of which now one and now the other prevails. He is so filled with his own memories that an autobiographic impulse sometimes masters him, and in yielding to it the sense of proportion and relevancy leaves him. Thus we have the successive chapters in which Wilhelm discourses to Mariane on his boyish interest in the puppet-show—a divagation for which Goethe himself seems to ask pardon from his readers. In Wilhelm's disquisitions on *Hamlet*, so interesting in themselves, we have a similar forgetfulness of artistic considerations; they are hardly dramatically fitting in the mouth of a youth who has just made acquaintance with Shakespeare, and they distract the reader from what he is given to understand is the primary intention of the book. At other times Goethe's didactic tendency, which grew upon him after the Italian journey, leads him to forget art; he makes even Philina utter aphorisms, and Barbara express herself in a manner strangely out of keeping with her character and position. On the other hand, in the early chapters, it is the creative instinct of the artist that prevails with him so that he fashions the various figures as observation and imagination directly suggest. Goethe was apt to talk of his greater works with an air of solemn mystery, and of *Meister* he said that it "was one of his most enigmatic" works, and that he himself did not possess the key. By the clashing and intermixture of motives he certainly bewilders a reader who expects to find a leading conception developed with logical sequence and symmetry of parts.

The most glaring fault of *Meister*, however, is the disharmony between the two worlds in which Wilhelm is made to move—the world of the actors, and the world of the Secret Society. In the former, as has been remarked, things happen naturally,

and the persons who appear in it are real human beings ; in the latter, all is fantastic and chimerical, and belongs to a different order of creation. For the modern reader, it is generally agreed, even in Germany, that the Secret Society acting as an earthly Providence, the Central Tower in Lothario's Castle, the Hall of the Past, the obsequies of Mignon are mechanical inventions, void of reality. And the astonishing events that are made to happen, in order to explain the relations of the different characters, are so fanciful and far-fetched that they deepen the sense of unreality. Regarding the work as a whole, and recalling that in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* we find similar shortcomings, we are disposed to agree with the judgment of Emerson, that Goethe, the great lawgiver of art, is not himself an artist.

It is noteworthy that all the characters in the *Lehrjahre* who have most reality appear in the *Theatralische Sendung* with the same traits and idiosyncrasies. Wilhelm is the same susceptible being ; Philina, Mignon, and the Harper are assigned the same parts, and act them in the same fashion. They are, therefore, the creations of Goethe while his imagination was still plastic, before he began systematically to theorize about art, and therefore before his reflective tendency began to conflict with the spontaneous play of his creative powers. In view of the altered conception of the later work, we might have expected that Wilhelm would have been assigned a character more in keeping with his higher destiny. But it was an irresistible impulse of Goethe to make his heroes weaklings ; we have the long succession of Weislingen in *Götz*, Werther, Tasso, Wilhelm Meister, and Eduard in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, all men more or less the slaves of their emotions. In this impulse we may see his almost morbid preoccupation with that side of his nature by which, as he himself frequently said, he was in danger of making shipwreck of his life. In making Wilhelm the characterless figure he is,

however, Goethe seriously marred the interest of the tale. Wilhelm von Humboldt called him "an insignificant and senseless creature," and he has the general opinion with him.<sup>1</sup> In both of the worlds in which he moves—the world of the actors and the world of the nobility—he appears equally as a nonentity, and his conduct with relation to Therese and Natalie renders him ridiculous. It may even be a question, whether one made of such stuff was capable of developing into the self-poised man Goethe meant to make him. Philina, on the other hand, is by common consent one of Goethe's successful creations. As he represents her, she is a non-moral creature, in whom kindly or mischievous instincts are indifferently at the prompting of the moment. Pleasure is her only object, and she seeks it with all the arts with which nature has endowed her, and with no rational regard to any consequences. We neither like nor dislike her, and we follow her play as that of a creature outside the sphere of ordinary mortals.

Mignon and the Harper are among the best known of Goethe's creations, and the figure of Mignon especially has continued to fascinate the world. Yet, in regard to both, the criticism first made by Schiller has its grounds from the point of view of art. They fill so large a space in the book, and Goethe expends so much pains on their delineation, that they assume a proportion which considerations of a symmetrical whole should not have assigned to them. We may attribute to Goethe's interest in what he called "problematical natures" the curious care which he devotes to the portrait of Mignon. She is as much a pathological as an artistic study; and Schiller animadverted on what he called "the repulsive heterogeneity" of her nature, though he admits that she becomes more interesting and attractive towards her end. Owing to her cruel

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle calls Wilhelm a "milk-sop." Goethe's own opinion of Wilhelm varied. See above, p. 667.



fate, she lost the healthy instincts of childhood; and as she develops under the kind sympathy of Wilhelm, her heart is passionately stirred by three emotions—her almost canine devotion to him, her longing for the southern land of which she retains a vague memory, and her religious feeling which, in her unhappiest time, leads her to attend mass every morning. It is her songs rather than the traits of her character that have clothed her with the halo that surrounds her—those songs which express the soul of her being and are at the same time among the things of Goethe which have made the most general appeal. The Harper is a purely pathological study and not, like Mignon, an attractive one. His character and history are alike repellent, and form no integral part of the book. The story of his fate, as told in the Marchese's narrative, can only be regarded as an excrescence, which explains his hallucinations, but which the structure of the novel as a whole should have excluded. It was doubtless from some hidden motive that Goethe chose to tell the repulsive story, and it was in keeping with the views he held when he wrote it that the Harper's horrible fate is ascribed to a canon of the Church. As with Mignon, the Harper's songs—the lines beginning *Wer nie sein Brot mit Thränen ass* and *Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergiebt*—expressing with incomparable power and pathos the anguish of a soul in the grasp of a malign fate, have made him one of the vivid figures among the creations of modern art.

Despite its definite title, the general aim and burden of the book have been variously interpreted from the day of its appearance, and Goethe himself has expressed inconsistent opinions on the subject. At one time he said that Mignon is to be regarded as the central theme; at another, that what is to be looked for in the story is the presentation of "a rich, manifold life . . . without any express tendency"; and, again, that its main object was

to show the results of a false tendency as illustrated by Wilhelm's mistaken preoccupation with the theatre—a theme which always deeply interested Goethe, who during many years of his life had mistakenly conceived that nature had intended him for a painter. When he entitled the book Wilhelm's *Lehrjahre*, we naturally infer that his primary intention was to show how his hero developed under the various influences to which he was to be subjected. But the book has so little unity, there are so many cross currents in it, so many inconsistent motives, that we have no distinct impression of a pervading purpose. If anywhere, it is in the later Books, those added to the *Theatralische Sendung*, that we have to look for a leading motive; and in these Books we have, at least, a dominant theme. The subject which preoccupies the Secret Society is the education of the individual, of whom Wilhelm is the type, with the object of developing his whole nature harmoniously and thus preparing him to perform his full measure of service to the society in which he finds himself. The essential condition of his successful development is that he should have a definite aim, and an aim consistent with the powers that nature has given him. While he has this definite aim, however, it is necessary that he should continuously seek to multiply his interests, in order that no side of his nature may become torpid. Only by action combined with reflection can his goal be eventually attained. It is noteworthy that, in the educational scheme of the Society, the influence of nature, to which Wordsworth attached paramount importance in his own mental and moral growth, has no place. Art takes the place of nature; at every turn Wilhelm is brought into contact with works of art, by the sight of which he is lifted out of himself. Religion is not omitted in the general scheme, but it has its place only as one among several agencies necessary to the development of feelings natural to man. To evoke all the potentialities of

the individual is thus the aim of the Society, and its ideal is in such complete accordance with Goethe's own, at the period when he wrote the book, that we are justified in concluding that to put it before the world was the main object he had in his mind.

From its first appearance the book has failed to find wide acceptance either in Germany or elsewhere. In Goethe's own immediate circle it was coldly received; Herder, Wieland, and Frau von Stein were repelled by it, and Fritz von Stolberg, Goethe's enthusiastic ally in the Werther days, burned it. Only three friends, Schiller,<sup>1</sup> Körner and Wilhelm von Humboldt, admired and appreciated it with a fullness of understanding that gave its author pleasure. It was enthusiastically applauded by the youthful writers of the Romantic school, which came to birth at the very time when it was written. Friedrich Schlegel, their leader, gave a glowing notice of it, in which he said that the French Revolution, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and *Meister* were the greatest tendencies of the age, and subsequently the Romantics paid it the sincerest of compliments by imitating it in their innumerable productions. And their admiration of it is easily explicable; the romantic elements in the book—such as the characters of Mignon and the Harper, and the obsequies of Mignon—appealed to the instincts that united them as a fraternity.

To the educated German public in general *Meister* has never been acceptable; "it is and ever will be strange to the German nation," wrote one German critic. There are, we are told, two reasons for this. It has not the interest of an ordinary work of fiction; its hero proves characterless and dull, his aims without reality, and his continual

<sup>1</sup> Schiller's praise was enthusiastic. "I cannot," he wrote to Goethe, "describe to you how deeply the truth, the beautiful vitality, the simple fullness of this work has moved me. The emotion is, indeed, less tranquil than it will become when I shall have thoroughly mastered the book, and that will then be an important spiritual crisis for me."



sermonizing a weariness. The other reason is one that has banned it in England as well as in Germany. "When people speak of Goethe's immorality," says another German critic, "they point to *Meister*." Both in Germany and in other countries since Goethe's day the world has become familiar with works of fiction compared with which *Meister* is a chaste production. It can, at least, be said of it that it is void of all pruriency, and that it contains no scene or passage which can be charged with making vice alluring. It is a certain grossness, indeed, rather than any immoral tendency that offends the modern reader—a grossness which was no offence even in the highest society of Goethe's time. Still, it is true that, in a conventional sense, Goethe is immoral; he holds up Lothario, who has been something of a Don Juan in his day, as the embodiment of his ideal of human perfection, and this is quite in consistency with his abiding convictions. As we have seen, in the scheme of education he assigns to the Society morality and religion have the same place as poetry and art. If the play of passion does not interfere with the harmonious development of man's powers, Goethe is perfectly willing to allow it, and in the well-known lines which he sent to the actor Krüger, accompanying the gift of his *Iphigenie*, he has expressly said so.

Alle menschliche Gebrechen  
Sühnet reine Menschlichkeit.<sup>1</sup>

In England and France *Meister* has never been generally appreciated. To French critics its in-artistic composition has always been a stumbling-block. Writing in 1830 Jules Janin called it "un

<sup>1</sup> A sentence in Mr. B. Bosanquet's *Suggestions in Ethics* (p. 99), quoted from Mr. A. C. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, briefly expresses Goethe's attitude to morality and religion: "Make the moral point of view absolute, and you have become not merely irrational, but have broken with every considerable religion." The chapter in Mr. Bosanquet's book (*Reality of Evil*) in which he quotes this sentence is an excellent exposition of Goethe's point of view.

confus assemblage d'aventures triviales, de personnages ignobles, de mysticisme sans intelligence et sans frein"; Doudan found it "excessivement décousu et chimérique"; and Mérimée, who was favourably disposed to Goethe, described it as an "étrange livre où les plus belles choses du monde alternent avec les enfantillages les plus ridicules." In England opinion has been adverse no less on æsthetic than on ethical grounds; and De Quincey's notorious review (1825), in which he has pilloried himself, probably found many sympathetic readers. To Wordsworth the book was so distasteful that he could not read beyond the opening chapters. In spite of the laudatory preface to his translation, even Carlyle found it a sore trial to his Puritan instincts. "When I read of players and libidinous actresses and their sorry pasteboard apparatus for beautifying and enlivening the 'Moral World,'" he wrote to a correspondent, "I render it into grammatical English, with a feeling mild and charitable as that of a starving hyæna."

Yet, in spite of its imperfections as a work of art, in spite of the grossness of many of its scenes and the faded sentimentalism of others, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is among the great books of European literature. It is the exemplar of a type of novel which has had many successors in all countries—a form of fiction in which the writer makes his hero the bearer of the message which he wishes to convey to the world. It contains things in prose and verse which, regarded simply as literature, are in Goethe's happiest manner. It is in the richness of its content, however, that its greatness consists; in hardly any other book can there be found such a wealth of thought on so many subjects that are of living and permanent interest to men. But its supreme distinction is that it is a deliberate attempt to place before the world a new conception of the conduct of life which, if carried into practice, would result in a higher development

of the individual than was possible under commonly accepted ideals. And it is in this aim of the book that those who have set most store by it have found its chief value. "The large, liberal view of human life in *Wilhelm Meister*," Matthew Arnold wrote, "how novel it was to the Englishman in those days ! and it was salutary, too, and educative for him, doubtless, as well as novel." In the same strain of appreciation the idealist Emerson wrote of the "immoral" book. "I suppose no book of this century can compare with it in its delicious sweetness, so new, so provocative to the mind, gratifying it with so many and so solid thoughts, just insight into life, manners and characters ; so many good hints for the conduct of life, so many unexpected glimpses into a higher sphere, and never a trace of rhetoric or dullness."



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### WILHELM MEISTERS WANDERJAHRE

GOETHE originally intended *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* to be a complete work in itself, but a hint from Schiller that he should follow it up by a second part found a ready response, and he acted on the suggestion. The title, "Apprenticeship," indeed, seemed to imply that there should be a sequel; the apprentice had to complete his initiation into his craft by years of wandering from one town to another. In view of his intention, therefore, Goethe let fall hints in the *Lehrjahre* that his readers were to expect a sequel. But it was not till 1807, two years after Schiller's death, that he addressed himself to his task, and he did so, in Carlyle's phrase, "in rather an unexpected sort." He began not with a resumption of Wilhelm's fortunes, but by dictating a number of tales, old and new, which had little apparent relation to his hero. All these tales subsequently appeared in the final form which the *Wanderjahre* assumed. The origin of *Die neue Melusine* dates from the Sesenheim days; *Die pilgernde Thörin*, a translation of a French tale, from 1789; *Sanct Joseph der Zweite* from 1799. The tales written expressly for the *Wanderjahre* were *Der Mann von fünfzig Jahren* (1807), *Das nussbraune Mädchen* (1810), and *Wer ist der Verräter* (1820).<sup>1</sup> Loosely connected with Wilhelm's travels, these

<sup>1</sup> Some of these tales had been previously published. It will be remembered that *Die Wahlverwandschaften* had originally been intended to make one of them.

tales make up the greater part of the first volume of the *Wanderjahre*, published in 1821.<sup>1</sup> From the manner in which the volume was put together, it will appear that the *Wanderjahre* did not promise to be better constructed than the *Lehrjahre*.

Goethe's further procedure with the *Wanderjahre* is one of the curiosities of literary history. It was not till 1827 that, prompted by the desire to add the completed work to his last edition of his writings, he seriously set himself to produce the second volume to which he was pledged. Eckermann has recorded how the work was carried out. The printed volume was copied by Goethe's secretary, and leaves of blue paper inserted in the manuscript which were to contain the matter that was to be added. Goethe's intention was to make two volumes of the completed work, but, as his secretary wrote widely, he was under the impression, when the manuscript was sent to the printer, that it would fill three volumes instead of two. The printer found, however, that the manuscript was not sufficient to fill even two volumes. This was embarrassing, as Goethe was not in the mood to produce the necessary new material. He solved the problem by doing what one of his latest German editors says that no one but Goethe would have dared to do. He handed to Eckermann two packets, containing papers on miscellaneous subjects, and instructed him to make a selection from these, and, though they had no relation to the book as a whole, to insert in the manuscript as many of them as were necessary to complete the two volumes. When the book appeared, adds Eckermann, "no one knew what to make of it," and it has continued to bewilder readers ever since.<sup>2</sup>

Goethe described the *Wanderjahre* as "a complex

<sup>1</sup> It was this volume which Carlyle translated.

<sup>2</sup> With reference to the manner in which the *Wanderjahre* was composed Lewes says: "This is an impertinence to the public; all the more remarkable as coming from a writer who thought so much of art." *The Life of Goethe* (1875), p. 539.

of the necessary and the accidental," and accident, at least, plays a large part in it. As he had used the *West-östlicher Divan* as a vehicle for his personal experience, so he seems to have regarded the *Wanderjahre* as a convenient repository for whatever whims, fancies, imaginings, and reflections passed through his mind while he had it in hand. A kind of miscellany rather than an artistically composed work, it has no consistent development, no continuous thread of interest on which the reader can lay hold. Goethe was not even accurately acquainted with the material he embodied in his work. There are disconcerting gaps, contradictions, repetitions, oversights, sufficiently explained by the manner in which it was put together. In preparing the final form of the book he made use of the printed first volume, but subjected it to drastic rehandling. He "took it to pieces," he says, retained what he thought appropriate to its new setting, transposed entire passages, and added much fresh material which extended its original scope and gave a new character to the book as a whole. The fresh material consisted of additional tales and, above all, of the sociological portions which reveal the widened scope of Goethe's interests during the years the *Wanderjahre* occupied his thoughts.

Though Wilhelm is the nominal hero of the book, he is only one among a multitude of figures, and not the one who plays the most conspicuous part. In the successive scenes through which he is conducted he is effaced by the persons whom he meets, and we lose sight of him in the long disquisitions to which he is a passive listener. As in the latter part of the *Lehrjahre*, he engages in no independent course of action, but is at the bidding of the mysterious powers who choose their own way of inculcating their ideals. Yet, if we are to find any guiding thread through the tangled skein, it is by following the successive experiences through which he is led to his goal.



As he is introduced to us in the opening chapters we find him travelling in a mountainous country, accompanied by his son Felix, now a well-grown boy. His travels, it appears, have been imposed on him by Natalie, and they are to be pursued under conditions which he eventually found burdensome; he is to stop no more than three days at any one place; and when he removes, it must be to the distance of a league. His first experience is, perhaps, the most charmingly related in the whole book. Among the mountains he comes upon a delightful valley, where a small community lead an idyllic life of pleasant toil. The most important person of the community is a carpenter who resides with his family in the chapel of a ruined monastery, originally dedicated to St. Joseph. Introduced to the household, Wilhelm is astonished to find the walls of the apartment adorned with paintings illustrative of the life of St. Joseph. In due course, the carpenter, who also acts as steward of the estate on which the monastery stood, relates the story of his life, which is entitled "St. Joseph the Second." Reared amid the sacred associations of the place and following the same trade as the Saint, he had come to regard himself as a mystical person, a Saint Joseph the Second, and his avocations as a dedicated service. Of all the tales in the *Wanderjahre* this is the one that bears most directly on its principal theme—the necessity of special handicrafts for the welfare of the individual and for the good of society at large.

While still with the carpenter, Wilhelm hears of a solitary being who spends his days in geologizing among the mountains, and from the description of him he knows (we are not told how) that the solitary is his old friend Jarno, who, however, has chosen to call himself Montan, as a name appropriate to his present occupation. Wilhelm and Felix set out in search of him, but, before he is found, Felix, while exploring a cave, discovers a little box, about

which we are told no more than that it is richly enamelled and of antique appearance, but which, the reader infers, contains important secrets. When, at length, they encounter Jarno, Wilhelm finds that he has not only changed his name, but is also changed in his being. He has ceased to be the man of the world who figures in the *Lehrjahre*; he has a definite aim, a definite mission. His talk is no longer of the generalities of the Indenture which admitted Wilhelm to the Secret Society of the Tower. When Wilhelm, recalling the former instructions of the Society, ventures to speak of the advantages of general culture, Jarno tells him that now is the time for specialization and limitation. "In all things," he exclaims, "to serve from the lowest station upwards is necessary. To restrict yourself to one trade is best." And his parting advice to Wilhelm is that he should take Felix to the Pædagogic Province where he will receive an education appropriate to his age and to the times.

Leaving Jarno, father and son proceed to a castle, the denizens of which are an Uncle (he bears no name) and two nieces, Hersilie and Juliette. They are hospitably received, and on the first evening, Wilhelm is sent to bed by Hersilie with a manuscript which he is enjoined to read before going to sleep. It contains a tale, entitled *Die pilgernde Thörin*, appropriated by Goethe from the French, which calls for no notice here, as it has no connection with the novel, though it conveniently ekes out some dozen of its pages. During his stay in the castle Wilhelm hears counsels which further remind us that we are in another world from that of the *Lehrjahre*. He is taken into a hall hung with pictures, which consist only of portraits, as he is informed that in the Uncle's opinion fictitious subjects lead the imagination dangerously astray. "From the useful through the true to the beautiful," he is further told, is the Uncle's life-maxim, and the maxim may be taken

as expressing the main burden of the *Wanderjahre*. The Uncle's principal occupation in life is the cultivation of his estate, which he conducts on principles of his own, summed up in the words "possession and common good." As these words are interpreted, they perfectly express Goethe's own persistent purpose in the application of all his powers. "Man," it is explained, "ought to keep firm hold of every possession and make himself the centre from which the common good may flow. He must be an egoist in order not to become an egoist."

Before he leaves the Uncle's castle, a second manuscript is put in Wilhelm's hands. It contains another tale, *Who is the Traitor?* which has likewise no relation to the development of the main theme, but serves the purpose of adding two chapters to the book. When this is finished, we accompany Wilhelm to the presence of a mysterious being whom we are to regard as the central figure around whom all the persons and events brought before us rotate like the planets round the sun. Her name is Makarie (the Blissful), and, in his conception of the attributes he assigns to her, Goethe evidently had before him the ideas of Swedenborg, whose writings he had at various times cursorily examined. Her pre-eminent and distinguishing attribute is that her being is subtly fused with the material solar system, and she is thus enabled to act as an intermediary between man and nature. She represents the highest good attainable by man, and her life is spent in beneficently guiding the destinies of all the persons who come within her sphere. She has two ministers who execute her wishes; Angela, a girl whose office it is to carry out her practical schemes of benevolence, and an astronomer who devotes himself with Makarie to the daily study of the heavens. Makarie receives Wilhelm as an old friend with whose past she is fully acquainted. In her presence he is conscious that she possesses a remarkable faculty—the faculty of discerning the



innermost nature of all with whom she comes in contact. Shortly after his arrival a manuscript is read aloud to him, the purport of which he sums up to the satisfaction of those present in these words: "Great thoughts and a pure heart are what we ought to pray to God for." At nightfall the astronomer conducts Wilhelm to the observatory attached to the house, where they hold solemn discourse on the relations of man to the immensities of nature,<sup>1</sup> and in a dream Wilhelm sees the glorified image of Makarie, whose occult attributes are subsequently expounded to him by Angela.

Among the multitude of persons in whom Makarie is interested, is one whom she expressly charges Wilhelm to seek out. He is a brother of Hersilie and Juliette, Lenardo by name, who subsequently becomes a prominent figure in the book. Wilhelm finds Lenardo, who straightway relates his history under the heading of *The Nutbrown Maid*.<sup>2</sup> Lenardo had been travelling about the world for the space of three years, and always with a load on his conscience. Before starting on his travels he had given a pledge to the daughter of one of his uncle's tenant farmers, that he would intervene with his uncle in favour of her father who was threatened with eviction on account of his failure to pay his rent. Lenardo, deterred by the knowledge of the Uncle's exacting nature, imperfectly fulfilled his pledge, and he could not rid himself of the feeling that, by his default, he had been the occasion of the ruin of both father and daughter. Lenardo then informs Wilhelm that he can have no peace of mind till he has discovered the present circumstances of the Nutbrown Maid, and Wilhelm undertakes to find her. By Lenardo's direction he calls on a nameless personage in a neighbouring town who may assist him in his search. This proves to

<sup>1</sup> Goethe was not himself specially interested in astronomy: it was too remote from human interests, he thought.

<sup>2</sup> She is also designated "Nachodine" and "die Schöne-Gute."

be an old man and a sage, who gives Wilhelm counsels similar to those which he had heard from Jarno. The mastery of some handicraft must precede all life, action, and art, and this mastery can only be obtained by self-limitation. "To know and practise one thing well is a higher culture than half-mastery in a hundred things." And Wilhelm is told that he will find these maxims carried into practice in the Pædagogic Province.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening chapter of the second Book we follow Wilhelm and Felix into the Pædagogic Province—the part of the *Wanderjahre* best known to English readers from Carlyle's translation and his insistence on its spiritual significance. On entering the Province, Wilhelm sees everywhere the evidences of a diligent community. The territory was partly mountainous and partly flat; on the mountains abundant flocks were grazing, and crops were being reared where the ground permitted. As it was the time of autumn, preparations were being made for the coming harvest. Wilhelm is astonished to see that this work is being carried on only by boys, attired in costumes of varying cut and colour. The two travellers, father and son, now encounter an Overseer who undertakes to conduct Wilhelm to the persons who preside over the Province—a mysterious body designated *the Three*. As they pass on, Wilhelm's attention is arrested by certain gestures made by the boys in the presence of the Overseer. The youngest crossed their arms on their breasts and looked up to the sky; those older held their hands behind their backs and cast their eyes on the ground; and the oldest of all held their arms by their sides, turned their heads to the right, and formed themselves into a line. On Wilhelm's asking for an explanation of these gestures, the Overseer tells him that it lies with the higher authorities to reveal the mysteries of the Province. As they

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm leaves the box found by Felix with the old man, who is a collector of antiquities.

proceed further, Wilhelm is struck by the increasing vocal melodies from the boys at work in the fields, and he is told that song forms the first part in the educational programme of the community, because both moral and intellectual discipline is most directly and effectively given to the young by song. Since Felix has been brought to the Province for instruction, he is left behind with one of the groups of boys (those engaged in learning agriculture), and Wilhelm and the Overseer, continuing their journey, at length come to a valley surrounded by lofty walls and accessible only through a gateway.

Entering by this gateway, Wilhelm finds himself in a delightful spot, thickly-grown with trees and bushes of every description, with stately buildings only visible through the foliage. The Chief of the Province, as it happened, was absent, but the Overseer conducts William to the Three, who receive him cordially as having entrusted his son to their care, and request him to ask what questions he pleases regarding what he has observed since entering the Province. Wilhelm's first inquiry is regarding the significance of the gestures which he had seen the boys make in the presence of the Overseer, and the explanation which the Three give to him Carlyle regarded as the transcendant proof of Goethe's spiritual insight. Children, Wilhelm is told, bring many gifts with them into the world, but there is one faculty which they do not have by nature, and which, therefore, must be instilled into them; it is the feeling of reverence for what is worthy of reverence. The gestures of the boys, the Three explain, are the external manifestations of this feeling which finds its expression in three different ways. By the crossing of the arms on the breast and the lifting of the eyes is symbolized reverence for what is above ourselves; by the holding of the hands behind the back and the casting down of the eyes, reverence for what is beneath us; and by the third of the gestures—the arms by the side and



the head turned to the right—reverence for our equals. These three forms of reverence distinguish three types of religion which have found place among men; the Ethnic, or religion of the Heathen; the Philosophical; and the Christian, which, as the highest type of all, “having once appeared, cannot again vanish.”

After these explanations Wilhelm is conducted by the Three into a gallery, the wall of which is decorated with scenes from the Old Testament. Here, he is told, the neophytes are initiated into the Ethnic or first religion, and it is explained to him that the illustrations are taken from Jewish history for three reasons: because the Jewish religion has endured, because it possesses incomparable sacred books, and because it has never embodied God in material form. In a second gallery the scenes depicted are from the New Testament history, and Wilhelm is struck by the fact that the series concludes with the representation of the Last Supper. The explanation of this omission of the last scenes in the Gospel history is in accordance with Goethe's own permanent attitude of mind. “We hold it a damnable audacity,” Wilhelm is told by the Three, “to bring forth that torturing Cross, and the Holy One who suffers on it, or to expose them to the light of the sun, which hid its face when a reckless world forced such a sight on it; to take these mysterious secrets, in which the divine depth of sorrow lies hid, and play with them, fondle them, trick them out, and rest not till the most reverend of all solemnities appears vulgar and paltry.”<sup>1</sup> Thus far Wilhelm is initiated into the mysteries of the Community, but he is informed that there is a last stage of initiation for which he is not yet ripe. At the end of a year, however, when he has been further proved, he will be admitted, if he chooses, to the Sanctuary of Sorrow, where the most secret mysteries will be revealed to him.

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's translation.

Meanwhile, he is conducted by the Overseer to the limit of the Province, whence he proceeds on his further travels.

The narrative of Wilhelm's travels, however, is not immediately continued. Goethe, professing as he does to be merely the editor of his materials, announces in his own person that at this point his readers may be gratified to have another tale as an interlude. Of this tale, entitled *The Man of Fifty*, it can at least be said that it is so far connected with the whole that its personages subsequently have a place in the book. The story is fantastic, and a mere indication of its drift will show why Goethe chose to tell it. There are five characters: the Major, his sister the Baroness, and his niece Hilarie, who all reside together; Flavio a lieutenant, the Major's son, and a young and charming widow. It is understood that Flavio is to marry Hilarie; but, by a strange perversity, he falls in love with the widow, and Hilarie falls in love with her uncle the Major. The widow repels Flavio's advances, but is strongly attracted by the Major, and so hopeless is the situation that the omniscient and omnipotent Makarie intervenes to arrange it—in what way, we are not clearly told. We see, however, what interest the tale would have for Goethe. He, also, in advanced years, had been an object of attraction for women in their early youth; and, as the Major, flattered by the admiration of Hilarie, betook himself to cosmetics, so Goethe had danced before Minna Herzlieb in proof of his youthfulness of limb and spirit.

The narrative of Wilhelm's fortunes is now resumed. He has found the Nutbrown Maid, and is able to report to Lenardo that she is in comfortable circumstances, but adds that, on no account, is he at present to go in search of her.<sup>1</sup> This task accomplished, Wilhelm sets forth on another journey. At the close of the *Lehrjahre* we are

<sup>1</sup> Lenardo subsequently finds her, and in comfortable circumstances.

informed that he has the intention of visiting Mignon's home on Lake Maggiore. This is the ostensible reason for his undertaking the journey now, but Goethe's real motive for bringing him to the Italian lakes was no doubt the recollection of the glorious days he spent there in his own Italian journey. And nowhere in the *Wanderjahre* are there such glowing pages as those in which this episode in the hero's devious wanderings is described. In crossing the Alps into Italy, Wilhelm falls in with an artist who is there for a reason that curiously illustrates the loose construction of the book. The artist had read the *Lehrjahre*, and had become so interested in Mignon and her history that he had resolved to visit her home to paint certain scenes in her life. Joining company, Wilhelm and he descend to the shores of the lake and make for the palace of the Marchese, the uncle of Mignon. They find that he has not yet returned, and they spend some joyous days on the lake, the artist busily sketching such scenes as specially appealed to him. But Wilhelm has been led to expect that their company will be increased, and one day they come upon a splendid barge in which they find Hilarie and the young widow who figure in the tale of *The Man of Fifty*. Some days of intoxicating pleasure follow—the four equally lost in their enjoyment of the glorious scenery and in the intimacy of their intercourse. But the day of parting comes, sad for all four, but specially for the artist. Hilarie, the Widow, and Wilhelm are all initiates, called to renunciation; not so the artist, who, however, through their example and inspiration joins the body of Renunciants.

Wilhelm, as we saw, was to return to the Province at the end of a year to be initiated into its last mysteries; but, in point of fact, several years elapse before he revisits it. On this occasion he is introduced to another of its divisions—one in which the Community is occupied in the rearing of horses.



Here he comes on his son Felix, who, not finding the agricultural region in which he had been originally placed congenial, had, in accordance with the principles of the Province, been permitted to make the change. In the description of the conditions that regulate the horse-rearing region, Goethe indulges in his most fanciful vein. Wilhelm suggests to the Overseer, who again accompanies him, that the feeding of animals does not seem an elevating occupation, but he is reassured. The youths engaged in this business, he is told, have excellent opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of languages. They come from all parts of the world, and so do the purchasers of horses. It is necessary, therefore, that buyers and sellers should be acquainted with each other's tongues and, to prevent a Babel, it is a rule that speech should be confined to a single language during each month of the year. Moreover, if a youth shows a special liking or talent for any language, he is afforded facilities for mastering it. But not only has the community the opportunity of acquiring languages; provision is made for their training in the arts—music, instrumental and vocal, dancing, architecture, drawing, sculpture and even poetry. In connection with the cultivation of poetry the Head of the Province made a remarkable distinction: only epic poetry was taught, the drama was ignored. On Wilhelm's asking an explanation of the omission, he is told that the stage implies the existence of an idle multitude, and that there are no idlers in the Province; and, further, that from its very nature the drama has an injurious influence on all the other arts. Wilhelm, whose old enthusiasm for the drama we know, took this exposition home to himself; and Goethe in his own person drops a humorous protest against a view of the drama which was a condemnation of so much of his own life work.

Wilhelm is now conveyed to another district of the Province, where a mining community prosecute

their labours among lofty mountains. At this moment they are holding high festival, and, to his astonishment, Wilhelm finds among their chiefs his old friend Jarno, attired in stately robes. The talk that ensues between them is, as usual, purely didactic, and, in the course of it, Goethe takes the opportunity (as he does in the Second Part of *Faust*) of introducing his theory of the formation of the earth's crust, and of affirming the absurdity of the Vulcanists. They discourse also of deeper things—of the meaning of life, of the mystery of nature; but Jarno is as cryptic as ever in the expression of his opinion. "What does it all come to?" exclaims Wilhelm at last; and Jarno delivers himself of a maxim which may be taken as condensing the moral of the whole book: "Thought and action, action and thought," he says, "that is the sum of all wisdom." In the concluding chapters of the second Book we are again diverted from Wilhelm's travels, and our attention is directed to his son Felix, now grown to manhood. Felix is in love with Hersilie, the sister of Lenardo, and a mysterious bond between them is the enamelled box which Felix found in the cave. The box comes into the hands of Hersilie, and Felix eventually discovers the key, which breaks, however, when he attempts to open the lid, so that the secrets are not revealed, and are left by Goethe to the ingenuity of his commentators, who have differed much in their conjectures.

From the nature of its contents, and specially as coming from the hand of Goethe, the third and concluding part is the most remarkable section of the book. So heterogeneous are its materials, however, and so inconsequent in arrangement, that a connected summary of it is hardly possible. As in the two first Books, tales are introduced for the simple reason already noted—to extend the volume to its necessary length. We have the tale of *Die neue Melusine*, written, as we have seen, in Goethe's early youth, and here filling nearly a whole chapter.

A barber (not a very appropriate narrator) tells how in his wanderings he encounters a fairy who had assumed human proportions, and mingled freely with ordinary mortals. She presents him with a casket of which he is charged to take the utmost care, and for some time they travel together, she, however, occasionally making mysterious disappearances. At length a misunderstanding arises between them, and she explains to him the nature of her being. She has come from fairyland with the express object of marrying an ordinary mortal in order to increase the stature of the fairies who, to their detriment, have been gradually diminishing in size. On account of his conduct, however, the marriage cannot take place, but, as he is passionately devoted to her, she invites him to accompany her to fairyland. He consents, and, by the influence of a gold ring placed on his finger, his stature is diminished to fairy size, and he and she are transported to the fairy Court, of which her father is king. But he finds himself so uncomfortable in his strange surroundings, that he takes the earliest opportunity of returning to the ordinary world; an end which he achieves by breaking the ring on his finger. As we know, the tale dates from Goethe's youth, and it is told in his happiest manner. To most English readers the phantasy will probably appear a pretty nursery story, though German commentators have discovered in it stores of hidden wisdom. The other tale, *Die gefährliche Wette* (The Dangerous Wager), is a piece of buffoonery that brings home to us the defiant humour with which Goethe put the book together. A band of students are congregated at an inn, when a stately equipage arrives with an old gentleman of distinguished appearance and a very conspicuous nose. One of the students takes a wager that he will pull the gentleman's nose, and he wins the wager by giving himself out as a barber and by finding the opportunity of putting his art in practice.



The most prominent character in the concluding chapters is Lenardo, whom we find engaged in a great enterprise. He has formed a "Bond," an offshoot of the Province, of which Wilhelm and other persons who figure in the *Lehrjahre* are members, for by some means not particularly described, but mainly (we are given to understand) through the agency of Makarie, even Philina, Lydia and Friedrich have become serious persons, with a definite purpose in life. One object of the Bond is to transport a band of artisans to America where they are to form an independent colony. We are taken to Switzerland, where we are introduced among the mountains to communities of spinners and weavers, whose industries are described with a minuteness that reminds us of Goethe's lifelong interest in the mechanical arts. These communities are remarkable as being based on purely socialistic principles, and they work out their ideals independently of a State. There comes a momentous day when it has to be decided who are to proceed to America and who are to remain at home, and Lenardo delivers an address on emigration. The ideas he proclaims are in singular contrast to what is laid down in the *Lehrjahre* as the highest wisdom. There Lothario had spoken the famous words: "Here or nowhere is America." But Lenardo's oration is a panegyric on wandering as necessary to the well-being of the individual and of society. For artisan, artist, soldier, a vagrant life is indispensable to his highest development. It was a common saying, "Where it goes well with me, there is my Fatherland." "But," says Lenardo, "a better saying is, 'Where I am of use, there is my Fatherland.'" "Seek everywhere to be of use," he adds, "everywhere to be at home." A paramount duty on the members of the Bond, he concludes, is to practise and forward a morality without pedantry and austerity, in accordance with the one reverence that is born of the three. And as words of solace on the eve

of the departure of those members of the Bond who have chosen to emigrate, he recites the well-known lines beginning :—

Bleibe nicht am Boden heften,  
Frisch gewagt und frisch hinaus !  
Kopf und Arm mit heitern Kräften,  
Ueberall sind sie zu Haus.

Lenardo has expounded the economical principles of the Bond, and, oddly enough, it is given to Friedrich, who in the *Lehrjahre* is represented as a kind of seapegræe, to explain its ideas on religion and morality. It is in conversation with Wilhelm, who must have been impressed by the expositor, that Friedrich makes his communications. Religion and morality, he says, are the links that hold men together in society. To enable men to accept the inevitable is the object of all religions, and each must discover for himself what religion is most effective for this end. For their part, the religion which the members of the Bond had chosen was the Christian, because by inculcating faith, love and hope it disposed them to a mild resignation. It might be called pedantry, but they excluded Jews from their community, for the reason that they denied the origin and source of the Christian religion. As for morality, if they were asked what was the sum of it all, they would say : *Mässigung im Willkürlichen, Emsigkeit im Nothwendigen*.

In their own moral discipline they laid great emphasis on the proper use of time, “the greatest gift of God and nature,” and to ensure that the passing of the hours should not be unobserved there were express mechanical arrangements to remind them of it.<sup>1</sup> They attached great importance to the family circle, and duties were assigned to fathers and mothers, which, in the case of the Bond

<sup>1</sup> Goethe is insistent on the value of time. One of the most familiar quotations from him is the couplet :—

Mein Erbteil wie herrlich, weit und breit !  
Die Zeit ist mein Besitz, mein Acker ist die Zeit.

were the more easily performed, as each member of it was expected to stand on his own feet. If any one made himself disagreeable to his neighbours, he was removed for a time till he had better thoughts. In every circle there were three directors of police, who were changed every eight hours, just as there were shifts among the workmen. The members had no belief in majorities arriving at a right conclusion; <sup>1</sup> in the case of the world at large it may be necessary to accept the decision of the majority, but the Bond believed in a higher principle. As for the ruling authority in the community, it was thought necessary that it should not be located in one spot, as it was considered inexpedient that there should be a centralized capital.<sup>2</sup> Only slight punishments were inflicted on misdemeanants; to those who had passed a certain age it was permissible to admonish an erring neighbour, but only a chosen few among the eldest were allowed to disapprove or chide; and a special number were charged with assigning penalties. If any member of the Bond accumulated more wealth than was thought reasonable, less or more of it was taken from him that he might be taught repentance. Public-houses and libraries were disallowed, though on what grounds Friedrich says that he would rather not specify. Finally, documents dealing with problems that arise in connection with the Society were withheld from circulation.

Subject to these regulations and animated by these ideals a section of the community, of their own free will, proceed to America under the conduct of Lenardo. Among them are the characters with whom we have become most familiar: Wilhelm, Friedrich, Philina, Lydia and others. How they fared in the New World, Goethe has not chosen to

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's own opinion.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe did not think it desirable that Germany should have one capital city.—Eckermann, Oct. 23, 1828.



tell us. Each and all of them, at least, are prepared for all contingencies, since each is master of some craft or profession which will ensure him or her a livelihood; Philina is a skilled dressmaker, Lydia a skilled seamstress, and Wilhelm a trained physician.

From the foregoing sketch of the *Wanderjahre* it will be seen that it is, in Carlyle's phrase, a sequel to the *Lehrjahre*, "in rather an unexpected sort." The characters, new and old, have their being in quite different surroundings. It might almost seem as if the book were expressly intended to present a different aspect of human life and destiny from that which is shown in the *Lehrjahre*. Such an intention, indeed, is in complete accord with Goethe's genius and its development. Every book he wrote was a response to the immediate influences to which he happened to be subject. When he wrote the *Lehrjahre*, he was dominated by the Greek ideals in which he and Schiller saw the true goal of humanity. In the apprenticeship through which Wilhelm is disciplined into a complete man, art is the supreme instructress. Wholly self-centred, he is concerned only with his own self-culture, and his instructors of the Secret Society impress on him that such should be man's object if he is to do the best for himself and the world. But when, in the decade 1820-30, Goethe wrote the most characteristic portions of the *Wanderjahre*, there were new influences around him to which, as always, his nature responded. He had seen astonishing things since Schiller's death, which had opened his eyes to a future before humanity which was of the nature of a revelation. He had seen the full effects of the French Revolution in dividing the aims of rulers and peoples, and he fully realized that the nations had now before them a destiny previously undreamt of. The great problem of the future, it was brought home to him, was the training of the masses for the part they were destined to play. The main questions to be considered lay in the sphere of sociology, education,

religion and ethics, and these are the themes which receive principal attention. That Goethe treated them in the way he did, disconnectedly and fancifully, is in accordance with his consistent attitude towards all the problems of life. He was too conscious of the various sides of every problem, too keenly aware of his own susceptibility to immediate impressions, to identify himself with any dogmatic doctrine. In the *Wanderjahre* he makes Lenardo say expressly that the ideas he expounds are "suggestions" and not dogmas. Strange medley as it is, the book may be regarded as one of his most characteristic productions. In its fragmentariness, its mystifications, its symbolism, its caprice, we see the play of tendencies illustrated in the whole course of his life.

The insistent theme of the *Wanderjahre* is the necessity of labour, for the happiness of the individual and the well-being of communities. The carpenter, designated the "Second Saint Joseph," finds the blessedness of life in the exercise of his craft. In the Uncle, who is represented as assiduously cultivating his estate in his own interest and the interest of those dependent on him, we have the picture of one who, in a larger sphere, similarly finds the fulfilment of his life in strenuous activity. Makarie has her attendant Angela, whose principal duty is the education of the young. In the Pædagogic Province practical training of the boys in special pursuits is given the first place. In the concluding Book we are taken to the spinning, weaving, and mining communities, who pursue their respective crafts in the spirit of artists; for "handicrafts," we are told, "are strictly arts." A remarkable note of the whole book, indeed, is the dignity which Goethe assigns to the function of the artisan. In the eyes of Plato the artisan was a despicable creature, condemned by fate to an ignoble life from which there was no escape. In the *Wanderjahre* he is nature's nobleman, in the presence of whose

activities conventional rank and social position disappear. All the characters, whatever has been their previous place in society, acquire some profession or industry, and it is in virtue of the acquisition that they become members of the community. In this conception of the ennobling influence of labour we are far away from the *Lehrjahre*, where the line that separates noble and commoner is always sharply drawn.

The scheme of education presented in the *Wanderjahre* is in equally strong contrast to that of the *Lehrjahre*. In the latter, only the culture of the individual is taken into account, and the leading characters are absorbed in their own affairs. In the *Wanderjahre*, on the contrary, the education of the masses is made the prime concern. In his handling of this theme Goethe, it is evident, was largely prompted by Pestalozzi, who, indeed, invoked him to use his genius and authority in forwarding the higher interests of the multitude. Pestalozzi was the first to conceive and proclaim the idea of an education for the masses as distinct from that of the classes, and in his Pædagogic Province Goethe has taken up the idea, for the youths assembled there are represented as coming from every social grade. It was in agricultural occupations amid rural scenes that Pestalozzi found the most propitious conditions for evoking the best instincts of the young, and such are the conditions which Goethe has imagined for his Province. It was, further, the principle of Pestalozzi that the main object of education was to foster the spontaneous development of the forces of nature. So, in the Province the youths are permitted to choose their circle; Felix, in deference to his own liking, is allowed to remove from the agricultural to the horse-rearing community. The difference of discipline to which father and son are respectively subjected, it may be said, forcibly illustrates the contrast between the leading ideas of the *Lehrjahre* and the *Wanderjahre*.



In the sociological portions of the *Wanderjahre* Goethe pictures an organization of labour, which in its motives and aims is opposed to his personally expressed convictions. As he presents his different communities of craftsmen, they exist apart from each other; they are strictly socialistic in their aims, and the primary consideration of the individual is the well-being of the community to which he belongs. But in a conversation with Eckermann (1830) Goethe expressed very different views. Eckermann had turned the conversation on Saint Simonism and remarked that its principle was that the individual should work for the happiness of the whole as a necessary condition of his own. To this remark Goethe replied with an exposition which deserves quotation as the definitive expression of his maturest thoughts on the relations of the individual and society.

“I think that each ought to begin with himself and make his own fortune first, from which the happiness of the whole will at last unquestionably follow. Altogether, this theory appears to me perfectly impracticable. It is in opposition to all nature, all experience, and all the course of events for thousands of years. If each one only does his duty as an individual, and if each works rightly in his own vocation, it will be well with the whole. Never, in my vocation as an author, have I asked what the multitude would have, and how I can be of service to the whole; but I have always endeavoured to improve myself and sharpen my own faculties, to raise the standard of my own personality, and then to express only that which I had recognized as good and true. This has certainly, I will not deny, worked usefully in a large sphere; still, it was not my aim, but the necessary *result*, which is found in all the effects of natural powers.”<sup>1</sup>

The place which Goethe assigns to religion and morality in the Pædagogic Province and in the

<sup>1</sup> Oxenford's translation.—Eckermann, Oct. 20, 1830,

Bond is in accordance with his own abiding conviction. They are the links, as Friedrich told Wilhelm, which hold men together in society. He was equally in accord with himself in making the Christian religion the accepted faith of the different Communities. But it was the Christian religion as he understood it; in Goethe's conception the two supreme contributions which Christianity had made to humanity were reverence for what is worthy of it, and the renunciation of motives and desires that thwarted what is noblest in human nature. It is implied in this view of renunciation that historic Christianity has banned actions and aspirations which are not only legitimate, but which in reality forward the attainment of a perfected humanity. He lays down no rules for the regulation of conduct; he leaves it to the individual to consult himself regarding the manner and measure in which he is to deal with the endowment nature has given him. It is understood, however, that all who become initiates should make it their highest aim to cultivate reverence and renunciation as the attitudes of mind from which life derives its richest blessing. As animated and inspired by these feelings, the members both of the Province and of the Bond formed a kind of Church of which Makarie, as the intermediary between man and nature, was the visibly divine head.

A recent German biographer of Goethe called the *Wanderjahre* one of his "dead works," and the fact cannot surprise us. In his royal way Goethe compares the book to life itself with all its confusions;<sup>1</sup> but in the transference of life to a book we look for a presentation of it, which will give the impression, not of confusion, but of an ordered whole. The *Wanderjahre* lacks almost every quality requisite to interest the majority of readers. Its heterogeneous materials, not in themselves popularly attractive, are not presented in a fashion

<sup>1</sup> He also calls it a "vielumfassendes Drama."

that beguiles the reader's attention. There is not a character in the book who enlists his sympathies, for none of them are real human beings. All are mere automata embodying certain theories which their creator has chosen to assign to them. Moreover, as German critics unanimously tell us, the book is, except in certain passages, written in a style which bears all the traces of failing emotional and intellectual powers. To readers who study it seriously to attain an understanding of its real import a difficulty presents itself. How far is Goethe serious in his description of the Utopias of the Province and the Bond? Certain of the characteristics which we find in these Utopias, are opposed to opinions which he expressed subsequent to the completion of the *Wanderjahre*. Frequently, also, sheer phantasy is so blended with what appears to be meant seriously that we have a feeling of mystification. The gestures of the boys in the Province, symbolizing the three reverences, for example, suggest a play of fancy which disturbs the reader with a sense of unreality. Yet, when all is said in depreciation of the most capricious of Goethe's productions, it contains such a revelation of himself and so much that is of permanent interest and value that it will continue to reward every reader who is content to take it for what Goethe meant it to be—a symbolic representation of life itself.



## CHAPTER XXXVII

### *FAUST*—FIRST PART

It is by the tragedy of *Faust* that Goethe has his place among the great poets of the world. Impressive as a manifestation of intellectual and imaginative power, the play has the further interest of being a unique biographical document. Conceived and begun in Goethe's early youth, it received his final touches a few months before his death in his eighty-third year. The manner in which it was brought to birth is, therefore, another illustration of Goethe's inability to produce a prolonged whole by persistent, continuous effort. Most of his lengthier productions, whether of his early or of his later years, required intermittent effort, extending over long periods, to bring them eventually to a conclusion. But *Faust* is the most striking illustration of this peculiarity of Goethe's mind. Between its inception and its completion there intervened some sixty years, during which, either of his own prompting or through some external incentive, he made the successive additions which resulted in the completed whole as we have it. A great poem, composed in such a manner and dealing with the deepest problems that interest man, must necessarily be a revelation of the soul and mind of its author in their most characteristic workings. In following the growth of *Faust* from its beginning to its end, therefore, we are tracing not only the genesis of a work of art, but also the mental and moral development of the artist.

In speaking of the *Urfaust* something was already

said <sup>1</sup> of Goethe's original interest in the legendary Faust, who, in his impatience of human limitations, sold himself to the devil in order to overleap them. The poet tells us that in the story of Faust, he saw a similitude to his own experience of life as it had been conditioned by his own nature and by the character of his time. Others besides Goethe were similarly attracted by the fate of Faust—a proof that it made a general appeal to the more energetic spirits of the age. In the previous generation Lessing had been interested in the theme, and had written a fragment upon it, though he viewed it in a different light from Goethe. But it was to Goethe's contemporaries that the legend appealed most directly. Impatience of tradition in literature, art, and social convention was the inspiring motive of the youths of the *Sturm und Drang*, and they saw in Faust an attitude of mind which typified their own. Many of them, therefore, essayed the subject, but only Goethe succeeded in treating it in a fashion that has given it a permanent interest.

According to his own statement it was in 1769, during the period of invalidism that followed his wild years in Leipzig, that the conception of his *Faust* first came to him. Physically and mentally, during that period, his condition was such as to produce in him the sense of baffled effort which drove the Faust of the legend to his desperate contract. Measured by the hopes and ambitions with which he had gone to Leipzig, his life there had been a failure, and he had returned home sick in body and morbid in mind. He was also in the atmosphere of the legend when, to solace his convalescence, he dabbled in chemical experiments and studied such visionaries in science as Paracelsus and van Helmont. Yet it is more probable that it was during the year and a half (1770–71) he spent in Strassburg that the first thought came to him of the legend as a “vessel,” to use his own

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 213.

phrase, into which he could pour his own experience. It was in Strassburg that he came into full possession of his genius, that his conception of poetry was transformed under the inspiration of Herder and other influences, and that his passion for Friederike Brion stirred his whole nature to its depths. His state of mind and heart in Strassburg therefore supplied him with all the material which went to the production of the *Urfaust*. No line of *Faust*, however, appears to have been written there. It is to the years (1771-75) which he subsequently spent in Frankfort that we have to refer the first actual work on the poem which was to have so chequered a history.

In connection with the beginning of *Faust* it is well to remember Goethe's handling of other productions of the same period. *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther* were written in the course of a few weeks, and *Clavigo* in one; but there was a whole series (*Prometheus*, *Mahomet*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Der ewige Jude*) each of which he began and dropped when the inspiration left him. It was even a probability that *Faust* should share the fate of these abortive attempts; from his intermittent work on it in its early stages we are to infer that, as in the case of the fragments named, the original inspiration was short-lived. The exact date when he set his hand to *Faust* has not been determined. There is conclusive evidence, however, that the whole of what is known as the *Urfaust* was written between 1773 and 1775—the Auerbach Cellar scene in September and October of 1775, those distracted weeks which he spent before his departure to Weimar. The successive portions of the *Urfaust* were not all composed like *Götz* and *Werther* at one burst of inspiration, although, according to his own testimony, each was written “off-hand without a rough draft.” It is uncertain in what order they were composed, but in all probability the opening scene was the first to take shape. In it we have



the primary inspiration of the poem, and the germ from which both of the Parts eventually developed.

This scene introduces us to Faust seated in a Gothic chamber at a decisive hour of his destiny. He is in a mood of hopeless disillusion and despair; he has spent his life in the attempt to master all the learning and science accessible to man, and the result has been moral and intellectual impotence. With faith in man, in the devil, and in hell all alike lost, he has taken to magic in the hope that it would enable him to penetrate to the reality of things. Interrupting his soliloquy, he opens the book of Nostradamus and the sign of the Macrocosm reveals to him a vision of the operations of Nature which entrances him for a moment, but which proves to be a mere show "signifying nothing." Indignant at the specious appearance, he summons the Earth-Spirit, but is overpowered by its presence despite his claim to be its co-equal. The scenes that follow suggest that Goethe had no clear conception of how Faust was to work out his destiny; otherwise, obsessed by his inspiration, as in the case of *Götz* and *Werther*, he would have found no deliverance of spirit till he had achieved its complete expression. The dialogue between Faust and Wagner, that between Mephistopheles and the Student, and the Auerbach Cellar scene are all prompted by personal memories rather than by their connection with the fortunes of the hero. But it is the latter part of the *Urfaust* which proves conclusively that Goethe had in his mind no definite plan of a drama concerned with the fate of Faust, with all the elements proportioned and arranged towards a determinate end. Nearly three-fourths of the whole are occupied with an entirely unrelated motive—the tragedy of the seduction of Gretchen. Mephistopheles, indeed, appears in the character assigned to him in the completed poem as the tempter of Faust, but the tragedy in itself is a self-subsistent creation, independent of the scenes that precede it. In

truth, one personal experience had effaced another, and Goethe's nature had of necessity found expression in a succession of scenes unsurpassed by anything else he ever wrote in their power of moving the heart.

When he originally took up the subject of Faust, it was not as the problem which it afterwards became for him. In the opening monologue he was merely giving utterance to the moral and intellectual ferment which he shared with his contemporaries. The tragedy of Gretchen was similarly prompted by contemporary interests and by his own personal experience. Cases of seduction and child-murder were then a morbid interest in Germany, and were a common theme with the sensational writers of the day. But there were reasons why the theme should specially come home to Goethe. With his desertion of Friederike Brion he could not but associate tragic possibilities, and the tragedy of Gretchen was written with his heart's blood, which cannot be said of anything else that came from his hand. The *Urfaust*, in both of its Parts, thus sprang primarily out of his own experience, and not from any definite intention of producing such a world drama as we have in the final form of the work. When, subsequently to the Frankfort period, he resumed the theme at different times, the direct spontaneous intuition never came to him in the same degree, and the continuation of the poem became more and more a problem to be deliberately solved by a purely intellectual process.

When Goethe went to Weimar in the beginning of November, 1775, he took with him the first draft of *Egmont* and the portions of *Faust* which he had written. In Weimar, ever susceptible as he was to immediate influences, he gradually became another man, morally and intellectually, with new ideals in life and art. His intellect and passions found new channels, and he appears to have had no impulse to continue his work at *Faust*. Such poems as *Das Göttliche* and *Grenzen der Menschheit* reveal an

intellectual phase separated by a gulf from the mood which produced the monologue of Faust. On different occasions what he had written was read to various listeners, who were profoundly impressed by its power and promise; but Carl August gave utterance to the general opinion when he said that it was “a piece of a piece,” and that the public feared that it would never be more than a “piece.”<sup>1</sup>

During the first eleven years he spent in Weimar the desire to continue his work on *Faust* was evidently not uppermost in his thoughts, and in Italy, whither he went in September, 1786, his state of mind was not such as to reawaken his original inspiration. During the period of his residence there, he was absorbed in the worlds of nature and of art, and his admiration of classical ideals grew with every day of his Italian sojourn. It was inevitable, therefore, that the “Northern phantoms” of Faust, as he afterwards came to call them, should become more alien and distasteful to him. But he had taken with him to Italy the manuscripts of *Faust*, *Iphigenie*, *Egmont* and *Tasso*, and he had come under a promise to finish them for the edition of his writings being issued by Göschen. Moreover, as he was indebted to Carl August for the expenses of his travels, he felt himself under an obligation to produce some substantial work in return. *Iphigenie* and *Egmont* he did complete during his second residence in Rome, but the references to *Faust* in his letters show that he had no overmastering desire to continue it. On August 11, 1787, he wrote to the Duke that he would receive *Tasso* after the New Year, and that *Faust* would precede his own return—which tasks finished, he would leave a principal epoch in his life behind him. Three months later in the same year (November 3) he informs the Duke that there are two stones on the road before him, *Tasso* and *Faust*, and he compares his pains with them to the

<sup>1</sup> *De: König in Thule*, which is in the *Urfaust*, was published in 1782.



punishment of Sisyphus. Two months more elapse, when he tells the Duke that in order to write *Tasso* he must fall in love with a princess, and that to write *Faust* he must give himself over to the Devil, to neither of which adventures he was inclined. But the most significant revelation regarding his dealings with *Faust* is contained in a passage from his *Second Sojourn in Rome*, dated March 1, 1788. This throws such a clear light on the condition of mind in which he took up the drama again that it deserves to be quoted in full.

"It has been a fruitful week," he wrote, "and seems like a month when I look back on it. First I drew up the plan of *Faust*, and I hope that the operation has been successful. Of course there's a great difference between finishing the piece now, and finishing it fifteen years ago. I think it will lose nothing by the delay, especially as I now believe I have recovered the thread. In respect, too, of the tone of the whole, I feel comforted. I have already completed a new scene, and if I were to smoke the paper, nobody, I think, would be able to pick it out from among the old ones. As the long rest and retirement have wholly restored me to the *niveau* of my own existence, it is remarkable how much like my former self I am, and how little my inward nature has suffered from years and adventures. The old manuscript, when I see it before me, often makes me think. It is still the original one, even the main scenes written down off-hand without a rough draft. Now it is so yellow with age, so out of order—the sheets were never stitched together—so soft and worn at the edges, that it really looks like the fragment of an old codex, so that, just as in those days I transplanted myself into an earlier world by thought and imagination, now I transplant myself again into a part of my own experience."

These various references to *Faust* leave us with the impression that Goethe resumed it out of no overpowering impulse, but as a task which it was

incumbent on him to complete to the best of his power. He had lost its original "thread" and to recover it he had to throw himself back into his past by an effort of will. He thought he had succeeded in the effort, and, in accordance with the new "plan" <sup>1</sup> he had formed, he wrote to his own satisfaction two additional scenes <sup>2</sup> during his second residence in Rome—*Hexenküche* and *Wald und Höhle*. Subsequent criticism, however, has found that in neither of these scenes has Goethe achieved the success he imagined. In the Witch's Kitchen we are introduced to a different atmosphere from the magical one in which Faust originally moved. It would seem, too, that in his effort to recover the original mood in which he took up the subject, he overshot the mark and produced a scene whose repulsiveness and triviality are not redeemed by poetic suggestiveness. As representing the rejuvenation of Faust, it has its place appropriately enough after the Auerbach Cellar scene in the completed poem, but, artistically considered, it is of undue length, and, moreover, it displays the tendency which in later scenes was to mar so seriously the unity of treatment—the tendency to introduce references to contemporary questions foreign to the main theme. The scene *Wald und Höhle*, which, in the drama as we have it, follows the Summer-House scene, representing Faust and Gretchen in the relations of lovers, has met with severe criticism. The verse in which it is written is that which is used in *Tasso* and *Iphigenie* with the express intention of reproducing the effect of the verse of Greek tragedy, and it is, therefore, out of keeping with the tone of the original *Faust*. More serious objections have been adduced: the content of the scene suggests that Faust had relations with the Earth-Spirit which have no place in the preceding scenes; and it implies that Mephistopheles was an emissary of

<sup>1</sup> This plan has not been recovered.

<sup>2</sup> A third scene according to K. Fischer.

the Earth-Spirit and not of Hell, as is clearly indicated in what goes before, with the result that the pact of Faust is made unintelligible. Thus the general effect of the *Wald und Höhle* scene is that, by both form and substance, it breaks the unity and harmony of the poem as a whole.

Though Goethe was gratified with the success of the two *Faust* scenes he wrote in Italy, he was not stimulated to put all his other engagements aside, and devote himself unreservedly to the task he had resumed. He returned to Weimar in June, 1788, and during the following months he set himself to complete *Tasso*—a more congenial occupation. During the same period he was engaged on the *Roman Elegies* and the *Venetian Epigrams*, and was deeply interested in anatomy and optics. He was bound, however, to contribute a portion of *Faust* to the edition of his works then passing through the press, and at Easter, 1790, it appeared in the eighth volume under the title of *Faust, ein Fragment*. The *Fragment* differs from the *Urfaust* in several important respects; it contains no prose scenes; the dialogue between the Scholar and Mephistopheles is recast; the Auerbach Cellar scene is in verse; Mephistopheles, not Faust, plays the part of the Conjuror; and the Prison scene is omitted. The most important modification on the *Urfaust*, however, is the change that is manifest in Faust's aspirations. In the *Urfaust* he is consumed with the passion for universal knowledge; in the *Fragment*, as in the completed drama, the passion that devours him is for universal enjoyment. The reception of the *Fragment* was anything but encouraging; its inconsecutive character was not fitted to satisfy the general reader at a time when the French Revolution was engrossing men's minds. It was adversely criticized in contemporary journals, and even Goethe's own friends, Körner, Wieland and Schiller, thought its publication a mistake.

During the four years following the publication



of the *Fragment* in 1790 Goethe made no further additions to *Faust*. There were various causes which led him to put it aside. *Iphigenie*, *Tasso*, and the *Fragment* had alike been coldly received, and he felt himself alienated from a public which looked for different things from his hand. During these four years he came to be absorbed by two interests which relegated *Faust* to a subsidiary place in his thoughts. He was so obsessed by the French Revolution that he had to relieve his mind by the succession of pieces prompted by that event. And in May, 1791, he made his imagined discovery regarding the error of Newton's theory of light, and thenceforward, in a measure beyond *Faust* or any other of his imaginative works, the proving of his own theory absorbed his mental activities. Moreover, his classical affinities now dominated him more than ever, and he regarded with positive repulsion the theme of *Faust* and the artistic form which it demanded. It seemed not unlikely, indeed, that *Faust* would remain one of the many abortive productions which mark the track of his literary career.

The impulse to resume it, as happened so often with Goethe, came from without. In the spring of 1794 there was inaugurated the association with Schiller which was to result in such an efflorescence of his genius. Their intercourse had not advanced far when the stimulus of Schiller induced him to take up the long discarded *Theatralische Sendung* of Wilhelm Meister and to transform it into the *Lehrjahre*. To *Faust* Schiller performed a similar service; as we owe to Eckermann the completion of the Second Part, so we owe the completion of the First Part to Schiller. In a letter, dated the 29th of November, 1794, the latter makes the first announcement of his interest in *Faust*. The published *Fragment*, he tells Goethe, seemed to him like "a torso of Hercules," and he expressed a wish to see the portions that had not been given to the world.

It was the beginning of their communications on the subject, as recorded in their correspondence. And the record is of special interest in the psychology of genius; for it is a vivid commentary on the lines:—

But tasks in hours of insight will'd  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

The problem before Goethe in taking up *Faust* afresh was precisely similar to that which he had to face at the same period in dealing with the *Theatralische Sendung*. Since the *Sendung* was written, a new conception had come to him which necessitated an enlargement of its scope, and his difficulty was to effect a unity between the old work and the new. He found it an impossible task to achieve this with complete success; in his own words, he could not entirely get rid of the early treatment. So it was, as we know, with *Faust*; the emotional experience which had inspired the *Urfaust* was dead, and a new inspiration and a new conception were necessary if the early work was to grow into a harmonious whole. In the correspondence between the two friends we have the memorial of Goethe's efforts to compass this end.

Goethe's reply to Schiller's request for a sight of the unpublished part of *Faust* is remarkable; he dared not unpack it, he said, as he would then have to resume work on it—and for that he had not the courage; although, he adds, if anything would induce him to do so in the future, it was Schiller's interest in the poem. To another request of Schiller some weeks later (January 2, 1795) that he would bring some scenes of *Faust* to Jena with him, no reply is extant, and it is not till the following August that *Faust* is again referred to in the correspondence. "With *Faust*," Goethe then writes, "I get on just as with a powder which has once settled down after being dissolved; so long as you are there to shake it, it seems to be combining afresh, but as

soon as I am alone again, it gradually sinks to the bottom." An interval of nearly two years elapses before another allusion to *Faust* occurs in the letters. During these years, indeed, Goethe's other engagements might sufficiently explain the neglect. Apart from his scientific studies, he wrote much of *Meister*, collaborated with Schiller in the *Horen* and the *Xenien*, and completed *Hermann und Dorothea*. But the subsequent correspondence supplies the real reason why *Faust* had fallen into the background.

In the spring of 1797 Goethe determined to undertake a third journey to Italy and, in company with Meyer, to collect materials for their projected history of Italian art. The Italian campaign of Napoleon prevented his carrying out his intention, and he had to limit his travels to Switzerland, where he remained from the end of July till the middle of November. In conditions which led Schiller to say that he gave up the attempt to understand his friend's mental processes, *Faust* came to a veritable rebirth. During the weeks immediately preceding his Swiss journey, Goethe found himself so restless in mind that he felt the need of some fresh interest to steady him, and he turned to *Faust*. On June 22 he communicated to Schiller the result of his renewed effort. In his present distracted mood, he wrote, he had again taken up *Faust* with the object, if not of finishing it, at least of making material additions. There follows one of the most important statements in the history of the poem's development. He had arranged in masses all that had been written or invented, with a view to its further working out, though he had as yet only an "idea" how this was to be done—an idea, however, regarding which he had pretty well made up his mind. Henceforward, therefore, he must have had a plan of the work before him, though the difficulties of evolving it proved such as often to make him despair of success. His conflicting moods



regarding it are curiously illustrated in the letters addressed to Schiller during the weeks preceding his Swiss journey. On June 27 he wrote that *Faust* would always remain a fragment; on July 1, that he had made a considerable progress with the plan and general survey; on July 5, that *Faust* had been laid aside, as "Southern reminiscences" had driven the "Northern phantoms" into the background for the time being.

Another long interval was to elapse before Goethe again resumed his work at *Faust*, but the foundations of the First Part of the drama, as we have it, had been laid. During the month of June he had written the three opening pieces—the *Zueignung*, the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*, and the *Prolog im Himmel*. All three indicate the moral and intellectual change which Goethe had undergone since he had first put his hand to the *Urfaust*. The *Zueignung*, which has no essential connection with the drama that is to follow, is his confession to the world of the altered feelings and conditions under which he regarded the theme that had inspired his passionate youth. The most pathetic of all his self-references, it recalls the days of his original inspiration and of his youthful friendships, and expresses his indifference to a world no longer in sympathy with him. The *Vorspiel* is likewise not a component part of the drama, but primarily a self-deliverance on his experience as Director of the Weimar Theatre.<sup>1</sup> In the passionate protest of the Theatre-Poet against the opinions of the Director and the Merry-Andrew, who maintain that the object of the playwright should be to divert the populace, the author gives utterance to his own baffled endeavour to make the stage a means of educating public opinion. In the *Prolog im Himmel* we may have the "idea" out of which Goethe conceived that the drama might be evolved. In the Court of Heaven a wager is struck between Mephistopheles and the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> It was suggested by the *Sakuntala*.

Mephistopheles is given full liberty to exercise all his arts to the ruin of *Faust*, and is confident of his final victory. But the Lord is equally confident that he will fail, and, as we must suppose that the Lord is omniscient, we are assured that Faust will emerge triumphant from the ordeal. What Goethe now had to do, therefore, was to work out a drama in consistency with the wager.

He returned from Switzerland in the middle of November, but apparently not in a mood favourable to *Faust*. On December 6, he wrote to Schiller: "I shall probably one of these days be taking up my *Faust*, partly in order to get rid of this *Tragelaph*,<sup>1</sup> partly in order to prepare myself for a higher and purer state of mind, it may be for *Tell*."<sup>2</sup> In the spring of the following year (1798), the mood for *Faust* again revived, and, moreover, the publisher Cotta had expressed a wish to issue something fresh from his hand. On April 28 Goethe told Schiller that he would finish the work and that Meyer might be induced to make drawings for the "barbarous production." By the first week of May he was able to report that he had made considerable progress; the old, confused manuscript had been copied and its parts arranged and numbered in accordance with a detailed scheme; he could now, therefore, take it up when he felt in the humour. A notable part of his work at this time was the alteration from prose to verse of the wonderful Prison Scene, which concludes the First Part. In the *Urfaust* that scene had been written in prose, but Goethe's instinct told him that the painfulness of its theme required the medium of verse if æsthetic pleasure was to predominate in the mind of the reader. Less happily inspired was his resolve to embody in the completed drama a piece which had

<sup>1</sup> "Goat-stag" a hybrid monster. The name was suggested by the first volume of Jean Paul's *Hesperus*.

<sup>2</sup> It has already been mentioned that Goethe, as the result of his visit to Switzerland, thought of writing an epic on Tell.

been originally composed with no relation to *Faust*. In 1797 he had begun a satire entitled *Oberons und Titanias goldne Hochzeit*, and intended as a continuation of the war on the dunces initiated by the *Xenien*. On second thoughts both Schiller and Goethe resolved to abandon the war, and Goethe had the whim to give the satire a place in *Faust* and call it an *Intermezzo*. By general consent its admission into the tragedy is an artistic error. Consisting mainly of sarcastic references to contemporary art, literature, and philosophy, and their representatives, it has no connection with the fate of Faust, and the references themselves are so obscure as to make them void of interest for later generations. The insertion of the scene is, indeed, only another illustration of Goethe's inability to withhold extraneous matter in which he was interested from any imaginative work on which he happened to be engaged.

Between 1798 and 1801, the year when it was virtually completed, Goethe continued his work on the First Part of *Faust* in the same intermittent fashion. As usual, he had many other things in hand. He wrote numerous short poems and ballads, started the publication of the *Propyläen*, began his abortive epic, the *Achilleïs*, and translated Voltaire's *Mahomet* and *Tancred*—pieces which, as imitations of classical models, were not fitted to encourage the mood for his "*Tragelaph*." As his communications to Schiller show, indeed, it was always the same difficulty that prevented steady and continuous application to *Faust*—the difficulty of presenting the theme under the conditions of antique beauty. As it happened, certain favourable circumstances disposed him to entertain a more confident hope of achieving a happy result. The writing of his ballads, he says, had reawakened his interest in Northern themes. In 1798 had appeared the first issue of the *Athenæum*, in which the new Romantics proclaimed a doctrine of æsthetic in direct opposition to the classical ideals for which



Goethe and Schiller had been regarded as contending. But *Faust* must be essentially a romantic production, and, when it was given to the world, it would at least appeal to a public prepared for it. Moreover, an incident in the *Faust* legend suggested a means of bringing the Gothic and the Classical under one large conception. Goethe says that the notion had occurred to him long before. The legendary Faust is represented as procuring the Grecian Helena for a concubine, and Goethe was struck by the idea that his Faust might somehow be brought into significant relations to her also. From his letters to Schiller in September, 1800, we learn that he had formed a conception of how this was to be effected and had even begun to embody it in actual writing. His original intention was to find a place in the First Part of *Faust* for the Helena scenes, but, as we know, this intention was subsequently abandoned and they were to form a central and integral part of the continued drama. The importance of the fact that the conception of Helena suggested itself when it did, is that it renewed and quickened his interest in his uncongenial theme, and opened up possibilities of treatment commensurate with his matured conclusions regarding life and art.

With the exception of a few subsequent additions and modifications, the First Part of *Faust* was completed during the years 1800 and 1801. The scene, *Vor dem Thor*, in which Faust and Wagner, during their Easter evening walk, encounter Mephistopheles in the form of the poodle, has been assigned on uncertain grounds to the spring of 1800. That it is at least of relatively late date in the progress of the drama is proved by the fact that it is conceived and composed in Goethe's classical manner. Of the two scenes that follow *Vor dem Thor*, both entitled *Studierzimmer*, the first is of doubtful date, but we have Schiller's authority for assigning the second, containing Faust's pact with Mephistopheles, to

April, 1800. Planned in 1797 as introductory to *Oberons und Titanias goldne Hochzeit*, the *Walpurgisnacht*, which describes the witches' gathering on the Brocken, was finished in the last months of 1800 and in February and March of 1801. At Easter, 1808, the completed First Part was given to the world under the title of *Faust, eine Tragödie*. It was received with acclamation by readers of all classes and of all tastes. The German public again recognized the genius that had taken the world by storm in *Götz* and *Werther*; and thenceforward, not only for Germany but for Europe at large, Goethe was the poet of *Faust* and not the novelist of *Werther*.

The record of his efforts to develop the original scenes into a finished whole suggest that he regarded the task as an incubus of which it was necessary somehow to get rid. The admiration of the *Urfaust* expressed by the friends who had seen or heard it, by his most discerning critic Merck among others, was a strong encouragement to complete what he had so promisingly begun. But, as we have seen, during his first eleven years in Weimar the conception of *Faust* was effaced by new ideals, and he devoted himself by preference to other literary undertakings. During his Italian journey he did make the attempt to resume the threads where they had been dropped but, as his own words show, rather from a sense of obligation than out of urgent inspiration. On his return to Weimar in June, 1788, *Faust* still remained in the background; he wrote no new scenes, and it was only the demand of his publisher that led him to give the *Fragment* to the world in 1790. The years 1795-1801 saw the completion of the work, but his correspondence indicates how irksome and frequently ungrateful he found his toil. But for the stimulus of Schiller and the urgency of the publisher Cotta it is probable that the world would have been bereft of one of its great possessions. As late as March, 1800, Schiller expressed

to Cotta his fear that *Faust* would never be finished.

A work on the scale of *Faust*, produced under such conditions, could not have the unity of inspiration and harmony of structure possessed by works like the *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost*, in which the original intention of their authors is dominant from beginning to close. Goethe's first purpose had been to treat the Faust legend in a succession of scenes as he had treated the autobiography of Götz von Berlichingen, and to use them as a vehicle for expressing the emotions and aspirations that were agitating himself and his contemporaries. He outgrew this conception, but his difficulty was to find another that would enable him to develop a great whole on the foundations of the original scenes, of the power of which he was fully conscious. After long reflection he found what he considered such a conception, and, in accordance with it, he intermittently made the successive additions necessary to embody it. The spontaneous impulse to the theme of *Faust*, however, became spent, and the additions to the *Urfaust* are all more or less the result of conscious reflection. Composed in this fashion the poem, as a whole, must inevitably exhibit defects at once in the structural adaptation of its parts and in prevailing harmony of tone. *Faust*, it has been said, is the most faulty of the world's great poems. A brief sketch of its development will indicate the process by which it was built up.

As has been already said, the two introductory pieces, the *Zueignung* and the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*, form no essential part of the drama; the one expresses Goethe's personal feelings in resuming the work of his youth, the other his experience as Director of the Weimar Theatre. In the third piece, the *Prolog im Himmel*, the subject of the drama and the course it is to follow are announced. The Lord and Mephistopheles come to an agreement



regarding Faust: Mephistopheles is given full liberty to apply all his arts to effect Faust's spiritual ruin, and is confident of his success, the Lord being equally confident of his failure. In the opening scene of the First Act we have the oldest portion of the whole—Faust's despairing soliloquy, his disillusion with the vision revealed by the sign of the Macrocosm, the apparition of the Earth Spirit, and his dialogue with his famulus Wagner. This scene was extended<sup>1</sup> at a later date by a second monologue of Faust (after the exit of Wagner), which concludes with his resolution to end his despair by drinking poison, an act from which he is saved by hearing the Easter morning bells and the choruses of women and angels. Here we have the first discrepant note between the *Urfaust* and the portions of the drama as it was subsequently continued: reflection predominates over feeling, and the result is a perceptible change both in rhythm and in expression.

The next scene, *Vor dem Thor*, is, strictly speaking, the beginning of the drama, as we are prepared for its evolution by the *Prologue in Heaven*. Faust and Wagner in their Easter evening walk in the environs of the town, mingle with a miscellaneous crowd of townsfolk, whose various interests are described, and in the course of their walk encounter the poodle whose form Mephistopheles has assumed.<sup>2</sup> In this scene we have again Goethe's later hand, containing, as it does, a manifest contradiction to what is said in the first scene, and conceived and written in his fully developed classical style. Of similarly late origin, with the exception of one passage, are the two following scenes, both entitled *Studierzimmer*. In the first we have Faust alone with the poodle, soliloquising in a mood incongruous with that of the first monologue. His wild desires chastened, he takes up the New Testament instead

<sup>1</sup> From line 606.

<sup>2</sup> Originally Goethe had thought of a different means of bringing Mephistopheles and Faust together.

of the Book of Nostradamus, and his attention is arrested by the opening words of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word," which, he thinks, would read better: "In the beginning was the Deed"—a reflection, as critics have pointed out, expressing the conviction of the mature Goethe, but hardly in keeping with the character of Faust as originally conceived. The voices of spirits singing and the Easter morning bells interrupt the soliloquy, and Mephistopheles emerges from the poodle in the dress of a travelling Scholar. In the bantering conversation that follows, Mephistopheles reveals traits of character which, by their inconsistency with those he exhibits elsewhere, point to the intermittent manner of his creation. With the second *Studierzimmer* scene, containing Faust's pact with Mephistopheles, the soliloquy of Mephistopheles, and his talk with the Student, criticism has dealt even more severely. The pact has been found full of contradictions; the Mephistopheles of the soliloquy is not the Mephistopheles of the *Prologue in Heaven*, and in his talk with the Student it is Goethe's own voice that we hear.

The Auerbach Cellar scene, which is next in order, affords another illustration of the general tendency of Goethe's later manner. As it appears in the *Urfaust*, it is, with the exception of the opening lines, written in prose, and it has all the gusto of recent memories of scenes which the poet had himself witnessed in Leipzig. Done into verse in the completed drama, and with Faust as a mere on-looker, it has in some degree lost the character of improvisation that so markedly distinguishes the original. The Witch's Kitchen follows, and we have seen what strictures have been passed on it in its relation to the whole. Then come the successive scenes of the Gretchen tragedy which, except that the concluding one has been changed from prose to verse, are virtually as they appear in the *Urfaust*. In the *Urfaust* the Gretchen tragedy is a self-

subsistent whole, and the problem before Goethe was to make it an organic part of a complete *Faust* drama. Its disproportionate length was a difficulty that could not be got over, but it was impossible to sacrifice a work which is the supreme effort of his genius, and he retained it. To effect some kind of unity between the Gretchen tragedy and the other parts of the finished work, he added the three new scenes—*Wald und Höhle*, the *Walpurgisnacht*, and the *Walpurgisnachtstraum*. By general consent all of these are unfortunate interpolations. In the first there are statements which are at variance with the relations elsewhere implied between Faust and Mephistopheles, and the other two are excrescences out of harmony with the drama as a whole.

A saying of La Bruyère is doubtless applicable to Goethe when his writings are reviewed as a whole, "Il est peut-être moins difficile aux rares génies de rencontrer le grand et le sublime que d'éviter toute sorte de fautes." But, in truth, Goethe was as well aware as were his critics that he had not effected a complete fusion of the successive elements that make up the First Part of *Faust*. In one of his Conversations Eckermann represents himself as making some remarks to Goethe on this very point. The various scenes of *Faust*, he said, were "independent little worlds, which, each being complete in itself, do indeed work upon each other, yet come but little in contact." "The great point with the poet," he went on to say, "is to express a manifold world, and he uses the story of a celebrated hero merely as a sort of thread on which he may string what he pleases." "You are perfectly right," was Goethe's comment, "and the only matter of importance is, that the single masses should be clear and significant, while the whole remains incommensurable—and just on that account, like an unsolved problem, constantly dares mankind to study it again and again."

If Goethe intended his *Faust* to be a standing



riddle (and it would not be the only riddle he has offered), his intention has been realized. No poem has invoked in greater measure what Lamb calls "the conjectural spirit." "To master in a single lifetime all that has been written about *Faust*," says one of his German biographers, "is impossible,"—and the same writer adds that the multitude of commentaries on *Faust* has been prejudicial to its popularity as spreading the impression that it is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary reader. The general aim of the various commentators, indeed, has been, not to contribute directly to our enjoyment of it, but to raise problems to be solved. One attempt of commentators, which Goethe regarded as the besetting sin of his countrymen, and which he indignantly condemned, has been to discover an "idea" in *Faust* which will supply the key to its interpretation. In *Faust*, as in the case of his other longer works, he told Eckermann, there is no one governing idea either in the poem as a whole or in its different scenes. The concluding words of the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*, "From Heaven through the world to Hell," he said, "suggest a course of action, but not an idea: neither is it an idea, but only an illuminating thought, to regard the poem as the picture of a man struggling with error and finally attaining redemption." In words, the truth of which is avouched by all his works of larger scope, he described the working of his mind in the production of *Faust*. "It was not in my line, as a poet," he said, "to strive to embody anything *abstract*. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensual, animated, charming, hundred-fold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round off and elaborate such views and impressions . . ." And in the same passage, in words reminiscent of a well-known saying of La Bruyère, he indicates in what spirit a work of genius, like *Faust*, should be approached. "Only

have the courage to give yourself up to your impressions, allow yourself to be delighted, moved, elevated, nay, instructed and inspired for something great; but do not imagine all is vanity, if it is not abstract thought and idea."

*Faust* has one peculiarity that distinguishes it from the great masterpieces in poetry with which it has to be ranked; in it we have the manifestation of a puissant genius in its earliest and its maturest development. In the first monologue of *Faust* we have the passionately rebellious mood of Marlowe, deepened and enriched by the thought and experience of the world during the interval that separates the two youthful rebels; in the Auerbach Cellar scene, another side of youth, its defiant and frolicsome humours; and in the Gretchen scenes, all youth's keenness and freshness of feeling. From the poet's later hand we have the conversation between Mephistopheles and the Scholar, in which the cynical view of men and things is presented by the matured thinker and man of the world; the *Wald und Höhle* scene, where we have Goethe's contemplations on nature at once as a man of science and as a poet; and the wild Mayday night journey of *Faust* and Mephistopheles to the Witches' Meeting on the Brocken, a ghastly symbol of *Faust*'s own tormented course through the world of experience which he had bartered his soul to enjoy.

"There is in man," it has been said, "an instinct of revolt, an enemy of all law, a rebel which will stoop to no yoke, not even to that of reason, duty and wisdom."<sup>1</sup> This inalienable characteristic of human nature, as Goethe knew, ensures a permanent interest in his *Faust* as a type of struggling and aspiring humanity. The fate of *Faust* does not indeed constitute an exclusive interest of the drama, but it is an "illuminating thought" which is present to the reader and reminds him of the momentous issue at stake. It is probable that, in Goethe's

<sup>1</sup> Amiel (Mrs. Humphry Ward's Translation, 1913), p. 164.

original conception, Faust was to be overmastered by his passions and to make shipwreck of himself like Werther. There are indications of this in the completed drama. But such a conclusion was alien to the mind of Goethe in his maturity. In spite of his many pessimistic utterances even in his later years, his view of man's hopes and aspirations was essentially optimistic, and he was profoundly convinced that life was a boon which could be enjoyed and directed to beneficent ends. "Man wanders on the earth," he said, in a memorable passage, "in order to stablsh for himself an eternal being: duty and virtue are the means thereto." Such being his settled conviction regarding the issues of human life, it was imperative for him to change his original conception and to make Faust an exemplar of the lot of man as he described it in the lines :—

Denn ich bin ein Mensch gewesen  
Und das heisst ein Kämpfer sein.

In the First Part of the poem we are left in doubt as to whether Faust will eventually emerge victorious from his ordeal or not. At the time when he makes his pact with Mephistopheles, he had thrown all restraints to the winds. "Let us quench our glowing passions in the depths of sensuality," he says to his tempter. In the Auerbach Cellar scene, the first in which Mephistopheles seeks to gratify Faust's desire of knowing life in all its forms, he is a silent onlooker, and there is no hint to indicate how he regards it. He is disgusted by the hideousness of what he sees and hears in the Witch's Kitchen, but his passion is stirred by the image of the beautiful woman he beholds in the mirror. At the sight of Gretchen on her way home from her confessor, he shows himself a veritable Don Juan, utterly callous and bent at all costs on gratifying his desires. In her room a feeling of the sanctities of life is awakened in him and his better self gains the ascendancy,



but merely for the moment. When Mephistopheles tells him that he can win her only on condition of falsely testifying that Martha's husband is dead, he indulges in self-sophistications which Mephistopheles mercilessly exposes, and in the end consents, though reluctantly, to make the affirmation. In the wonderful Garden scene, where Faust and Gretchen, and Martha and Mephistopheles carry on their respective talks, Faust appears to be under the spell of Gretchen's artless innocence. From the *Wald und Höhle* we are to infer that he has resolved to leave her in her innocence, that his better soul has been awakened through his intercourse with nature, and that he has come to loathe the companion to whom he is bound. Reminded, however, that meanwhile Gretchen is spending her days in misery at his loss, he consents to rejoin her, and Mephistopheles accomplishes his immediate purpose. In the famous confession of his faith which he makes to Gretchen, is revealed his full consciousness of the double part he is playing. It is a self-sophisticating utterance which Mephistopheles justly mocks as an evasive answer to Gretchen's simple-hearted question. In the *Walpurgisnacht* scene his sight of the phantom of one like Gretchen in chains awakes in him a bitterness of remorse that impels him to seek her in her dungeon. From his passionate desire for her rescue, however, we are not to conclude that his better instincts have finally triumphed; for the time the feeling of the misery he has wrought overcomes every other, but the possession of Gretchen could not permanently satisfy a nature like his, and he has to run another course before, in accordance with his compact, he can say to the passing moment, "Stay, thou art so fair!"

But, as Goethe himself said, the thought of Faust's fate does not constitute the all-absorbing interest of the drama. We are made to forget his covenant with Mephistopheles by the range of gifts displayed in the successive scenes, which energize

in turn each faculty of the reader—reason, imagination, feeling. All the persons of the poem are types, but types of a different quality from those of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* or of *Die natürliche Tochter*. All in their own way are instinct with feeling and provoke a direct, human interest kept alive by the varying emotions they awake.

For Goethe, Mephistopheles incarnated the essence of all that in nature and human experience retards man in his higher development. Through faith and enthusiasm alone, he held, can man attain to his true humanity, and it is the part of Mephistopheles to paralyse these emotions at their source. He had seen partial exemplifications of the Mephistopheles' spirit in Behrisch, Merck and Herder ; and, according to Eckermann, he himself on occasion could display it in a degree that astonished his listeners. But it was a spirit essentially alien to his own, and Mephistopheles in his being was repugnant to his creator. Yet in none of his imaginative figures has Goethe displayed more careful elaboration, more continuous verve. The consistency of Mephistopheles as a mocker of all human ideals is complete ; his vivacity is irrepressible, his armoury of weapons inexhaustible. As he appears in contrast to Faust, he is a permanent reminder of the law of irony in the essence of things, of the absurdity that is interwoven with life.

In Goethe's matured conception the career of Faust was to typify the moral and intellectual temptations that beset man in the conduct of life and the conditions under which victory is to be won. Within his own experience Goethe had seen more than one endowed with good gifts make shipwreck of their lives. Two friends of his youth, Lenz and Merck, had ended their miseries by suicide—an act from which Faust was saved by supernatural intervention. The experience of the morbid youth Plessing had once suggested to him that success or failure in life is not in man's own hands. In

his *Harzreise*, prompted by Plessing's fate, he had written these lines :—

Denn ein Gott hat  
Jedem seine Bahn  
Vorgezeichnet,  
Die der Glückliche  
Rasch zum freudigen  
Ziele rennt !  
Wem aber Unglück  
Das Herz zusammenzog,  
Er sträubt vergebens  
Sich gegen die Schranken  
Des ehernen Fadens.  
Den die doch bittre Scheere  
Nur einmal löst.

It is another view of life's possibilities that is presented in the *Prologue in Heaven*—a view which is made to justify the Lord's confidence in Faust's final triumph over Mephistopheles. "Es irrt der Mensch, so lang er strebt," the Lord admits to Mephistopheles ; but he grounds his confidence in the ultimate salvation of Faust on what he further says :—

Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunkeln Drange  
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst.

In his youth Goethe had been exercised by the eternal problem of necessity and free-will, and he even wrote a short article on the subject, in which he concludes for man's power of self-determination. In the case of certain of his heroes, indeed, he represents them as powerless in the hands of destiny ; by "dæmonic" influence Egmont is borne along to his doom, and Werther, Tasso and Clavigo are made the victims of their temperaments. In the conduct of his own life, however, it was the pre-supposition of Goethe that it lay with himself to master the elements in his nature in which there were possibilities of disaster. This prerogative he assigns to his Faust, who is thus differentiated from the heroes of his earlier pieces. In all these characters he depicted a side of his own nature—his



“chameleon” habit of mind, his susceptibility to immediate influences; but to Faust he assigns the power of self-recovery which he himself possessed in such eminent degree. In Faust, therefore, we have a closer image of Goethe, as he was in his completeness, than in any other of the characters he has created. Faust, like Goethe, has a passionate desire to fathom the secrets of nature, and with this passion he combines the temperament of the poet. He is liable to be assailed, therefore, both on the side of sense and of spirit. In words already quoted, Goethe identifies Faust’s moral and intellectual despair with his own experience. “I also,” he says, “had wandered at large through all the fields of knowledge, and its futility had early enough been shown to me. In life I had experimented in all manner of ways, and always returned more dissatisfied and distracted than ever.” Of the Gretchen scenes, in which another side of Faust’s nature is displayed, the same may be said; they were directly prompted by his relations to Friederike Brion. Friederike regarded Goethe, as Gretchen regarded Faust—as one who had dropped into her circle from a higher sphere, and as possessed of gifts and graces new and strange to her. As she appears in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, her leading characteristic was precisely that artless innocence which, reproduced in Gretchen with such consummate delicacy of touch, makes the tragedy of her betrayal and doom almost too painful for æsthetic pleasure. How much of Goethe’s own experience inspired him in his delineation of Gretchen’s fate is attested by his own words relative to his desertion of Friederike. “Friederike’s reply to a written adieu,” he says, “lacerated my heart. It was the same hand, the same mind, the same feeling that had been developed in her for me and through me. For the first time I now realized the loss she suffered, and saw no way of redressing or even of alleviating it. Her whole being was before me; I continually felt the want of

her, and, what is worse, I could not forgive myself my own happiness."

The successive scenes which depict the relations between Faust and Gretchen till the culminating tragedy are Goethe's supreme triumph as a poet, and of all parts of the poem they make the widest human appeal, but they do not constitute its essential greatness. Its real greatness is found in its intellectual interest for the modern world. What the *Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* did for their respective ages, *Faust* did for Goethe's. Dante and Milton gave poetic expression to the deposit of thought into which they were born and which they accepted with personal conviction. Unshackled by any authority, Goethe in his *Faust* presents no systematic body of doctrine, but in its hero he symbolizes the human spirit in its limitless quest after satisfaction for soul and sense. By the intellectual and imaginative power with which this temper of mind is embodied in *Faust* the First Part of the drama has a foremost place among the poetic works of modern times.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### *FAUST*—SECOND PART

(BY LORD HALDANE)

PROFESSOR HUME BROWN had, shortly before his death, completed his account of the First Part of *Faust*, which forms Chapter XXXVII. in this volume. The Second Part he had considered, and he left a few notes which he had apparently intended to use. I feel that the attempt which follows, to accomplish what he alone could have completed as an harmonious critical estimate of the poem as a whole, is beyond my capacity to make adequately. But the alternative has been to leave his book defective, and this I do not think he would have desired. For not only did he bequeath to me his notes, but he and I had discussed the Second Part very frequently over a long period of years. I therefore think it best to try, however imperfectly, to supply the filling of what would otherwise be a gap.

It was the opinion of Professor Hume Brown that Goethe had no settled purpose of working out an abstract theme in *Faust*. His was not an abstract mind—

Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,  
Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum,

he makes Mephistopheles say to the student in the First Part. The thinker in him was ever giving place to the artist. At times it is his own personal feeling about the figures he creates, and their places



in a series of pictures, that is dominant over the ethical element which is still rarely absent altogether. This circumstance renders *Faust* an imperfect work of art. We do not find in it the quality of "inevitableness" in the sequence of the story, nor is the relation to one another of the scenes always apparent. Still in few poems of any period are there greater thoughts strewn about, and in still fewer is so lofty a level reached. There is much that is ponderous in the narrative, for instance the utterances of the Emperor of Germany, in the second scene of the First Act, to his suite, and their replies to him. But, as Matthew Arnold remarks in his essay on Scherer as a critic of Goethe, language of this kind is the outcome, not of servility in the poet, but of his German "corporalism." Corporalism, reverence for the authority of institutions as such, is a form of the abstract mind which has prevailed in different aspects throughout the short literary history which is all that Germany can call her own. She has not lived long enough as a nation to outgrow the tendency to attach undue importance to abstractions. France and England have long ago gone into revolt against this tendency. But among Germans we find it even among the philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, and we find it in Goethe. The militarism of modern times has in large part arisen out of this tendency. It has afforded a fertile soil on which to raise an exaggerated disposition towards submission to authority. The Revolution obliterated all traces of this tendency in France. It may be that the outcome of the recent great war will prove to have done enough to produce an analogous result in Germany.

Yet even in old Germany submission to authority has often been associated with freedom from self-deception. No one knew better than Goethe himself the futility of pomp and ceremony. He hated it as it showed itself concentrated at Berlin. But he was a German of the

eighteenth century, and in Germany in those days this kind of influence was everywhere in the atmosphere. We must take it as part of a larger context apart from which the poet could not be national. And it did not hinder Goethe from being, despite a form which often jars on us, what Matthew Arnold calls him, "the clearest, the largest, the most helpful thinker of modern times." He touched at moments the very highest level as an artist; he touched still oftener the highest level as a critic of life.

The key to both the First and the Second Parts of *Faust* is, in my own view, to be found in the Prologue in Heaven, which introduces the First Part. The author lays hold here of an idea which at moments passes out of sight in both parts. But it always recurs, and, with forms of expression which often vary, dominates the whole poem.

The Devil there converses with the Deity. In answer to the question whether there is nothing on the earth which he finds right, he replies that there is nothing that is not bad. When asked whether he knows Faust, the servant of God, he replies: "Forsooth, he is thy servant in a very odd fashion. His food and drink are far from being earthly. He is always looking beyond, and is half conscious of his own madness. From heaven he demands the fairest stars, and from earth the greatest pleasures; and yet neither what is at hand nor what is remote satisfies his unruly breast." But the Lord answers that "though at present Faust is serving me in a confused way I will yet lead him to the light." The Devil asks whether the Lord will give him permission to try to lead Faust away into his own particular path. The Lord replies that so long as Faust is alive so long may the Devil try; "Es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt." The Lord then bids him lead this man, if he can, away from the source of his being, and take him on to the downward path. He, however, warns

the Devil that he must stand ashamed if in the end he has to confess that "a good man even in the hours of darkest pressure is yet conscious of the true path that lies before him." The Devil joyfully accepts the permission thus given, and proclaims that Faust will end by eating dust and, like the serpent, eating it with pleasure. But the Lord rejoins that it is just because "the energy of man can too easily be made to slumber, in so far as he is apt to love doing nothing too fondly, that he has given him as his constant attendant one who tempts and works and creates as the Devil must. But do ye men, the true sons of God, rejoice in the beauty that lives in all its riches; the self-creative power that ever works and grows, do ye make your own in noble bonds of love; your task is to grasp and set in thought that endures what is else but passing appearance."

I think, as I have said, that so far as a single conception dominates the two parts of the poem it is in these words of the Prologue that it is to be sought for. But, as Professor Hume Brown has pointed out, it was not in Goethe's nature either to write poetry without reference to a guiding system of thought, or to write it for the purpose of setting forth such a system. He is pre-eminently a reflective poet but he is not consistently so. One has only to turn over the pages of the *Gedichte*, which consist of his short and isolated verses, to see how many-sided he was in this respect. *Adler und Taube*, *Das Göttliche*, and *Eins und Alles* lie in the volume side by side with *Erlikönig*, *Der König in Thule*, and *Kennst du das Land*. He seems, even in his most serious mood, suddenly to let himself go, and to break into the imaginative and sensuous. He does not intend in the Second Part of *Faust* to confine himself to one kind of poetry. He passes from mood to mood. It is Goethe himself that is the guiding thread, the Goethe of many phases and interests, the temporary domination of



which it is his set purpose not to resist. But just because it is Goethe himself that really appears in every scene, the scope of the poem is enlarged. For he was a man of all sorts of moods. In Part I. we have the Goethe who is still young. In Part II. we have the Goethe who, now mature, has come to most of his conclusions. But in both parts we have an intelligence of the first order, applying itself amid ever varying experiences.

The composition of Part II. was not less intermittent than that of Part I. Between the publication of the First Part and the completion of the Second, twenty-four years elapsed. Some portions of the Second Part were indeed written before the First was finished in its final form. But between 1800 and 1825 little was done with it by Goethe. It was in 1825 that he really set to work to complete his work. He finished it in the autumn of 1831, and it was published in its entirety in 1832, just before his death.

Before saying more about Part II. it will be useful to recall the course of its narrative, and to try to give a rather more detailed analysis of the story than was given in the case of the First Part by Professor Hume Brown. The reason is that the story is much less familiar.

In the First Part Faust has made his covenant with the Devil that if and when he should say to any moment of satisfaction with which the Devil might provide him, "Stay, thou art so fair," he should then serve the Devil as the latter was in the first instance to serve him. Professor Hume Brown observes that there seemed at times to be in Goethe's mind uncertainty as to whether this might not happen. But coupling the passages in the Prologue with the suggestion of contemptuous doubt on Faust's part of the capacity of Mephistopheles to satisfy him, I think that Goethe finally meant throughout to exhibit the attempt of the latter as ultimately destined to fail. Neither the Deity nor

Faust himself ever rated high the ability of the Tempter of Mankind to fathom the difference between quantity and quality.

However this may be, the Devil's effort to satisfy Faust, as recorded in the First Part, is a failure. Faust is disgusted with Satan's efforts and with himself. The seduction of Gretchen and her untimely fate have horrified him. It is therefore natural that in the Second Part a new order of pleasures should be offered by the Tempter. Faust is an older man, and what appeals to him is the sort of success about which an older man would care. Mere sensual enjoyment cannot suffice. Power over earthly resources and command of those of Art are more appropriate. It is probably true, as Professor Hume Brown thought, that Goethe's own mood had changed, and that in the Second Part the change is markedly manifested. He was now far away from the wild doings of his career as a student at Leipzig. He had had a long experience of official life at Weimar before he began to work again at the poem, and the influence of this is apparent.

Part II. begins with a scene in which Faust is lying on the turf amid beautiful surroundings, but in an uneasy and broken slumber. Ariel and other Spirits hover over him, and spray him with the waters of Lethe. The purpose is by means of sleep and oblivion to enable him to live afresh, to "make him strong to meet the day," and to restore him to the light. It is to nature that Goethe characteristically turns for the accomplishment of this purpose, and not to any moral stimulus. The sun rises, and Faust awakens firm in a resolution to strive towards the highest in life. The rays of the sun, forming rainbows in the spray of the torrent near him, move his spirit, and in the refracted colours he sees the symbol of human life which is never unbroken light. The scene concludes with a famous line in which he expresses this at the end

of a soliloquy, “Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.”

The next scene is laid in the hall of the German Emperor's palace. The Emperor advances to the throne amid a crowd of ministers and retainers. But there is gloom, for money is lacking everywhere, and society is falling into disorder for the want of it. The Emperor's Court-fool has died and his place is still vacant. He was a very fat man. Suddenly there appears, as a candidate for the post, a very thin stranger. It is Mephistopheles in disguise, and he is appointed. The Emperor is at the moment in despair over the reports of his ministers, and he turns to the new fool and asks him whether he cannot add to the tale of woe. But Mephistopheles laughs at the ministers, and tells the Emperor that there is abundant wealth that can be made available. It is everywhere to be found, he asserts, in the shape of buried treasure hidden in various parts of His Majesty's dominions in the days when the Empire was invaded. The Emperor bids Mephistopheles, if this be so, to procure this wealth. The latter at once undertakes to do so. There is a good deal of doubt about his character among the ministers who listen to him, but the majority declare that they do not mind how he gets the money, if he will only get it. He undertakes to produce it by Ash Wednesday, which is impending. Meantime a carnival masquerade is organized, and this is the subject of the third scene in the First Act.

In this scene the herald announces all manner of poets, but there are so many of them that they cannot compete in an orderly fashion. He then summons a variety of figures, such as the Graces and the Parcæ, famous in Greek mythology, and finally Plutus with his wealth. This is displayed to the crowd, but Plutus frightens them back by setting the surroundings on fire. This flame, kindled by magic by Mephistopheles, who has arranged



everything beforehand, is extinguished by the same means.

In the fourth scene Faust and Mephistopheles appear together at the Emperor's Court, and Faust asks the Emperor's pardon for having brought about this jugglery of flame. The Emperor, who has been delighted with the spectacle the two have produced without damage to him, not only pardons but thanks them. Presently the Lord High Steward, the Commander-in-Chief and the Treasurer enter hastily to give the Emperor great news. Paper money has been created on Mephistopheles' suggestion, in the shape of notes issued in the Emperor's name and secured on the buried treasure hidden in his dominions. Every section of the community is delighted and money is now abundant. The notes are accepted in place of currency, but, as one of the ministers observes, "mit Rabatt," at a discount, still, with this qualification, freely.

"Such paper," declares Mephistopheles, the inventor, "'stead of gold and jewellery,"

So handy is—one knows one's property,  
One has no need of bargains or exchanges,  
But drinks of love or wine as fancy ranges.

At first the Emperor is shocked and asks who has dared to append his signature to these notes. But he is told that he had himself sanctioned the measure for the "people's good" the night before, perhaps not realizing the mode in which the benefit would be conferred. On being reminded of this the Emperor at once assents to what has been done, and not the less willingly because he hears that his health is being drunk everywhere. As a reward for their services he appoints Faust and Mephistopheles custodians of the soil where the treasure is supposed to lie.

The fifth scene follows at this point. The Emperor has expressed a wish that the strangers should enable him to see the model forms of man

and woman, Paris and Helena; and Faust, feeling bound to comply, demands that Mephistopheles should produce them. The latter, who has retired with Faust to a sombre gallery, makes difficulties. Faust calls him the father of impediments; Mephistopheles replies that he has really no power over the special Hades of antiquity which holds Paris and Helena. Yet, he says, there is a way. He refers Faust to the "Mothers." These are supernatural beings, the reference to whom Goethe is said to have had suggested to him in reading Plutarch, and he appears to have seized on the notion of them as typical of the unfathomable origin of all forms, and particularly of the origin of an ideal of beauty for the poet and the artist more real than the most perfect work of nature. He puts into the mouth of Mephistopheles a description of them as "unreachable and unbeseechable." Faust is deeply affected and shudders. Mephistopheles places in his hand a little key, which begins to increase in size and to glow. He feels himself inspired, and as if escaping "from the created to shapeless forms in liberated spaces." Following the directions given to him he lets himself be sunk into space, and descends until he sees a blazing tripod. This he touches with the key, and it follows him. He has been told that the tripod, when brought to earth from its place near the Mothers, will transform the incense-mist that surrounds it into such gods as he may call for.

In the sixth and seventh scenes the Court is again assembled in the halls of the palace and is full of expectation. There is a stage, sitting in front of which Mephistopheles acts as prompter. The Court astrologer explains to the audience the nature of a Greek temple which covers the stage. Faust rises into view on its floor and invokes the aid of the Mothers. Paris appears in the temple and is presently followed by Helena. The audience is much impressed, but the ladies are critical of Helena. Paris sleeps, and Helena bends over and

kisses him, to their indignation. Faust, transported by passion, becomes madly jealous, to the concern of Mephistopheles. Paris awakens, and rising clasps Helena in his arms and begins to carry her away. Faust, unable to restrain himself, again appeals to the Mothers, and tries to seize Helena from the arms of Paris, turning his key against him. There is an explosion. Faust is left senseless on the ground and the spirits dissolve in vapour. Mephistopheles takes Faust upon his shoulders and disappears into darkness.

Thus ends the introductory phase of the preliminary Helena scene. So far Goethe has gone little further than Marlowe in bringing in Helena by way of illustration. But presently, in Act III., we shall see that he gives her a great place in the poem. This was not necessary for its development. But we know that Goethe was from time to time so deeply under the influence of Greek art that he could think of little else. It was in such a mood that he appears originally to have written the main part of the Helena, as a separate piece, which he afterwards introduces into Part II.

Act II. now opens in the high-arched narrow Gothic chamber which was formerly Faust's study. He is lying on a bed in a space curtained off from the study. Mephistopheles is by, and is looking at the objects around, still undisturbed, which recall the interview in Part I. at which Faust signed the compact with him. The pen is still there, with traces of Faust's blood upon it. An old fur robe hangs from a hook, and when Mephistopheles shakes the robe a swarm of insects fly out and welcome their patron in chorus. He puts on the robe. A famulus, the attendant of Doctor Wagner who is now in possession, appears on the scene, and on seeing a strange figure in Faust's old robe is terrified. He explains to Mephistopheles that Wagner has kept the study as it was, in the hope that his master, Faust, would some day return. Mephistopheles



demands to see Wagner, but the famulus explains that Wagner is immersed in carrying out a tremendous experiment. Mephistopheles sends the famulus to fetch him. While he is gone on this errand a Baccalaureus, or senior student, enters. He is full of self-conceit. He sees the figure seated in a chair and addresses it, recalling that he is the same student who had come to that room to interview his teacher a long time before. But he adds that he has outgrown his old order of thought and is now quite a different man. Mephistopheles proceeds to flatter him, but the Baccalaureus grows worse, instead of becoming modest. The old ideas belong to the past. Goethe puts into his mouth an exaggerated version of the least restrained utterances of the subjective Idealists who at that time were exaggerating the doctrine of Fichte. The student speaks in the language of Fichteanism gone mad, and identifies the activity of his own consciousness with the creation of the universe. Goethe, who hated metaphysics, especially of this order, now does what happens at times in the course of both parts of the poem. He uses Mephistopheles as his vehicle of expression. He makes him laugh at the student's claim to have discovered truth, and says aloud:—

Who can think wise or stupid things at all,  
That were not thought already in the past ? ”

In the second scene of Act II. we find Wagner at his furnace in the expectation that he has discovered a new method of bringing about life by mechanical means, which will render its generation by the sexes an unnecessary process. The secret is a process of crystallization in a closed retort. Wagner believes that a man can be thus produced, and Goethe makes this a fine occasion for Mephistopheles to play pranks on the innocent pedant. For Mephistopheles enters the laboratory, making Wagner nervous by his intrusion, but with the result that a glass phial in

a crucible vibrates and gives forth sound. Presently there appears, enclosed in it, a manikin, the Homunculus, who greets Mephistopheles as "cousin," and expresses a desire to begin to work with him at once. A side door opens now and reveals Faust stretched on his couch. The phial slips out of Wagner's hands and hovers over Faust. Homunculus warns Mephistopheles that if Faust awakens there he will die, and that he must be removed to other surroundings. He adds that this is the eve of the *Classical Walpurgis-night*, and that in its atmosphere and its scenery Faust might be restored. Mephistopheles, who knows only the spirit world of the North, is puzzled, and is not reassured when he is told that the journey must be to Greece, to the plain through which the Peneus flows. However, he complies with the bidding of Homunculus that he should throw over Faust his magic mantle, and follow Homunculus who will show the way. The wretched Wagner is left behind in solitude.

We now come to the famous third scene, that of the *Classical Walpurgis-night*. To describe it in any detail is impracticable. It opens in the Pharsalian Fields with a prologue from the spectral form of Erichtho, "the gloomy one," who, however, withdraws on the approach of the living. Faust is revived and called to fresh life by touching Grecian soil, and he and his two companions begin to look around. At once he begins to long for Helena. But he finds around him only Griffins and other unfamiliar creatures, including Sphinxes. With the last Mephistopheles exchanges greetings, but on both sides they find themselves strange, and proceed to make inquiries of each other. To try to describe the scene and its changes would be useless. Goethe is here not didactic. He lets his imagination run riot. Apparently his only definite purpose is to bring together Classic and Romantic ideas, and to show us Faust impelled by Greek imagination towards a higher level in the development of new forms

of beauty. It is at this point that the significance for the poem of the introduction of Helena appears. Marlowe also brought in Helena, but with no definite purpose like this. With him Faust was not to be redeemed. With Goethe, too, Faust is not to be saved by a redeemer who is independent of him, but he is to redeem himself by working out his own deliverance from his lower nature; first by the awakening of love for the beautiful, and then by the choice of unselfish and altruistic ends as the highest bliss of life. The First Part of course contained a *Walpurgis-night*. There the scene is Gothic and mediæval and leads to nothing. Here the *Classical Walpurgis-night* is the introduction to the *Helena*, which was written before it, and is a poem complete in itself, which does not arise out of the drama Goethe unfolds, but is rather an excrescence on its form.

The first sketch of the *Classical Walpurgis-night* was apparently begun as early as 1800, but it remained a mere sketch until 1830, and was only finished in Goethe's eighty-first year. He himself spoke of it as an ascending slope on which the reader is to rise gradually to the *Helena*. The idea of the beautiful is only intermittently developed in it, for the disturbing presence of Mephistopheles, the "Being that denies," is required by the scheme of the narrative. Several of the many commentators on the poem have said that the key to the development is "Homunculus," whom Goethe seems to represent as the figurative embodiment of the nascent new life which has entered into Faust himself. Freedom of spirit was for him among the great possibilities of humanity, and he found it embody itself in its most perfect form in Greek Art. "Let each one," he said, "be a Grecian in his own way; but let him be one."

When in the *Walpurgis-night* scene the travellers alighted from their journey through the air, the touch of the soil of ancient Greece restored Faust



to the full possession of his faculties. His first question on awakening was, "Where is Helena?" He appeals to the Sphinxes, who tell him that she lived after their line had expired, but that when Chiron comes galloping round, which he will do in the course of this ghostly night, he may consent to take Faust with him to seek her. A little later, after Faust has stood by the river and spoken with the nymphs who try to detain him, the sound of hoofs is heard and Chiron appears. He consents to take Faust along with him. He brings him to the temple of Manto, who shows him a way under Olympus to the presence of Persephone.

In the rest of Act II. Faust does not reappear, but the two scenes which conclude it describe the experiences of Homunculus and Mephistopheles in the region of the upper Peneus and by the seashore. Mephistopheles continues to find himself unfamiliar with what he encounters in this spirit-world of antiquity; Homunculus is more at home.

But we now pass from them, to see the development of a new Act. This is the famous Act III. which opens in Sparta, in the palace of the husband of Helena. He is Menelaus, and is not himself present, but he has sent his wife, rescued from his enemies, to the palace, to make preparations for his return, and to prepare for a solemn sacrifice. What the character of this is to be she does not know, and from the manner of Menelaus on board the Spartan ship of war in which he brought her back from Troy, out of the hands of the rival who had abducted her and whom he has disposed of, she is not without anxiety. However, his injunction to her was to inspect her palace and see that everything was in order, and this she proceeds to do. She herself is accompanied by a Chorus of captive Trojan maidens who were brought away with her. They are all in reality but shades summoned from Hades, whither indeed they really went three thousand years before the days of Faust, but of this lapse of time they are

unconscious and they behave as denizens of the modern earth. Helena goes into the palace to see that all is in order, but returns frightened. For she has encountered there the spectral figure of Phorkyas, whom at first she took to be the stewardess of the palace, but who has turned out to be a strange and terrible old woman. The latter now appears in the doorway before Helena and the Chorus, and delivers to them a gloomy and contemptuous exhortation. She upbraids them for their wanton past. They cry out against her appearance and manner towards them. Phorkyas abuses Helena and predicts for her death from the axe as the victim of her husband, Menelaus. The Chorus, she hints, will all be hanged. At her bidding dwarfs appear and bring forward the apparatus of sacrifice and death. Phorkyas now suggests that there is still a chance of escape. There is, north of Sparta, a tower where a daring and powerful race are governed by their master, one who is not a Greek, but is still a most attractive as well as powerful ruler. She will transport Helena and her Chorus to that tower if they wish. The trumpets of the approaching forces of Menelaus sound in the distance. This decides Helena, who assents. A mist rises and the whole party is swept through the air, and finds itself in the courtyard of a castle of the period, not of ancient Greece, but of the Middle Ages. Beautiful boys appear to welcome Helena. Finally Faust is seen, in the costume of a knight of the Middle Ages, at the head of a staircase. Phorkyas has disappeared. Faust brings with him in fetters Lynceus, a watchman, whom he has condemned to death for failing to observe and notify Helena's approach, but Helena asks for and obtains his pardon. By Faust's desire she assumes Faust's throne. She then invites him to occupy it as its lord and hers. They are now lovers. But their transports are interrupted by the sudden entrance of Phorkyas, who announces that Menelaus with his legions is storming after them over the plain. Faust

only laughs. For at his bidding powerful forces immediately assemble to drive back Menelaus. Faust gives his orders to the commanders. The scene now changes. All is tranquil. The maidens of the Chorus are happy in woodland surroundings. Time has elapsed. We have passed to another period. Even Phorkyas, who reappears, expresses the new feeling and its harmony :—

Hark ! the music, pure and golden,  
Free from fables be at last !  
All your Gods, the medley olden,  
Let depart ! their day is past.

You no more are comprehended ;  
We require a higher part,  
By the heart must be expended  
What shall work upon the heart.

Helena and Faust after an interval reappear. They now have a son, who is grown to manhood, Euphorion. He is full of energy. He goes about everywhere. Presently he clasps in his arms one of the maidens of the Chorus. But she turns to flame in his embrace, and dares him to follow her to the upper air. He mounts the rocks. The one thing that it has been foretold he must not do is to try to fly. But this he insists on doing, casting himself from the heights above. He is sustained for a moment by his garments, and then falls dead at the feet of his parents. But his voice sounds from the depths of the nether regions, bidding his mother not to leave him there solitary. She invokes Persephone, embraces Faust, and disappears into Hades leaving only her veil in his arms.

Phorkyas again appears and bids Faust hold fast to the veil :—

For thy use employ  
The grand and priceless gift, and soar aloft.  
'Twill bear thee swift from all things mean and low  
To ether high, so long thou canst endure.  
We'll meet again, far, very far from here.

Faust then vanishes borne aloft on Helena's veil.



The story of Act III. has now been described in its bare outline. The whole of its events owe their production to Mephistopheles, who is operating under the disguise of Phorkyas. The story in itself amounts to very little. It is only a means of expression. Goethe was before everything a thinker. But instead of putting his thoughts into abstract propositions after the fashion of the philosophers, his way was, as already observed, to embody them in imaginative forms. He thinks in images, but in images which are the expressions of a system of definite and comprehensive conclusions about God and man. He believed that in imaginative range the Greeks had possessed the highest order of gifts, but he also knew that in the nineteenth century humanity had to assimilate experience and science such as had never taken root on Greek soil. His endeavour was therefore to bring the form and quality of Greek Art into combination with the modern criticism of life. It was a daring effort, and opinion is likely to remain divided as to the extent of the success which Goethe attained in making it. What is certain is that for a mind less large than his and with less range, complete failure would have been inevitable. But Goethe's mind and its range were alike probably beyond anything the world has seen since Aristotle, and he knew what he was doing even when he was trying to attain to the unattainable.

The bare outline of the tragedy of Helena here given has been sketched merely for the purpose of helping the reader to follow the story. In itself this records no important events. What is really important is the wealth of imaginative imagery which Goethe bestows on it. He tries to become in spirit a Greek, and the effort is probably as successful as is possible for a modern. Still it is a German and not a Greek who is the artist. Some readers will be oppressed by constantly finding themselves reminded of this. Others will be reconciled to what may seem to them

little more than a wonderful *tour de force*, by the largeness of conception that is apparent in the drama.

Of the quality of the verse no English translation can give any real idea. Carlyle's is perhaps the least unsuccessful. Bayard Taylor's careful version has been used freely in the citations I have made. But it is to the German original that the student must go, if he is to grasp the significance of this poem, or the magnitude of the endeavour which Goethe has made to put new wine into old bottles. Whether the poet has succeeded remains questionable. What is certain is that we have before us an attempt by a man of genius of the highest order to combine Classical form with Romantic and even Nineteenth Century substance.

It is indeed not surprising that in reading the *Helena* we have always to be attentive to so many aspects of the theme that the task is at times overpowering. First of all, there is the effort at combination of form with substance belonging to a different age, to which reference has just been made. Then there is the antithesis between the way of thinking of Faust, a modern of the highest attainments, and that of Helena, a type of completely Greek womanhood. We feel that the gods of Greece are here pronounced to be superseded even when we are made to feel the actual contact of their presence. Finally, there is the fact that it is only by means of symbolic representation and suggestion that the gulf is spanned.

Wholly satisfactory as works of art, therefore, neither the *Helena* nor the *Classical Walpurgis-night* can be. But they are not the less very great works of art, for they have been called into existence by the concentration of his genius on the part of a poet of the widest knowledge and experience of life. If classicism, romanticism and modern thought could be combined thus, it was he alone who had the endowments which warranted the attempt. But the result could hardly be a poem

perfect in integrity and smoothness, and it is not so. We have before us rather a collection of fragments in this part of *Faust*. Modern ideas are always being intruded in ancient settings. Although Carlyle doubted it, when writing in 1828, it is now tolerably clear from the testimony of Eckermann that Goethe had Byron before his mind when writing the *Helena*. He admired the "dæmonic" factor in him. He would have accepted Matthew Arnold's estimate of Byron as "the greatest elemental power in English literature since Shakespeare." Of Byron Goethe said that "with all his boundless freedom he felt himself oppressed; the world was for him a prison. His going to Greece was not a spontaneous resolution; he was driven to it through his false relation to the world." There is not much room for doubt that in the image of Euphorion Goethe meant to symbolize this element in Byron's genius.

The reader who wishes to realize the range and greatness of thought in the *Helena* must for this and analogous reasons study it for himself. He will probably find a good deal that is repugnant to him. But the effort to assimilate this part of *Faust* is well worth the pain of making, not only for the wonderful richness in comprehension with which Goethe reproduces the form of Greek tragedy, but for the philosophy of life which underlies the symbols he uses. If the reader wishes for a guide in making the attempt, he cannot do better than turn to the Essay on the *Helena* published by Carlyle originally in 1828 in the *Foreign Review*, and reprinted in Volume I. of the *Miscellaneous Essays* in his collected works.

From this Essay it is permissible to quote, in order to show that, by the testimony of Goethe himself, the interpretation of this part of *Faust* just indicated is not unwarranted, the following extract from a translation which Carlyle gives in the Essay referred to. It is a rendering of what Goethe



wrote in 1827 in his journal *Kunst und Alterthum* on the *Helena* as an Interlude in the *Faust* which was appearing then from time to time in parts.

“Faust’s character, in the elevation to which later refinement, working on the old rude tradition, has raised it, represents a man who, feeling impatient and imprisoned within the limits of mere earthly existence, regards the possession of the highest knowledge, the enjoyment of the fairest blessings, as insufficient even in the slightest degree to satisfy his longing; a spirit, accordingly, which, struggling out on all sides, ever returns the more unhappy.

“This form of mind is so accordant with our modern disposition, that various persons of ability have been induced to undertake the treatment of such a subject. My manner of attempting it obtained approval: distinguished men considered the matter, and commented on my performance; all which I thankfully observed. At the same time I could not but wonder that none of those who undertook a continuation and completion of my Fragment had lighted on the thought, which seemed so obvious, that the composition of a Second Part must necessarily elevate itself altogether away from the hampered sphere of the First, and conduct a man of such a nature into higher regions, under worthier conditions.

“How I, for my part, had determined to essay this, lay silently before my own mind, from time to time exciting me to some progress; while, from all and each, I carefully guarded my secret, still in hope of bringing the work to the wished-for issue. Now, however, I must no longer keep back; or, in publishing my collective endeavours, conceal any further secrets from the world; to which, on the contrary, I feel myself bound to submit my whole labours, even though in a fragmentary state.

“Accordingly, I have resolved that the above-named piece, a smaller drama, complete within itself, but pertaining to the Second Part of *Faust*,

shall be forthwith presented in the first portion of my works.

“The wide chasm between that well-known dolorous conclusion of the First Part, and the entrance of an antique Grecian heroine, is not yet over-arched; meanwhile, as a preamble, my readers will accept what follows.

“The old legend tells us, and the puppet play fails not to introduce the scene, that Faust, in his imperious pride of heart, required from Mephistopheles the love of the fair Helena of Greece; in which demand the other, after some reluctance, gratified him. Not to overlook so important a concern in our work was a duty for us; and how we have endeavoured to discharge it will be seen in this Interlude. But what may have furnished the proximate occasion of such an occurrence, and how, after manifold hindrances, our old magical Craftsman can have found means to bring back the individual Helena in person out of Orcus into life, must, in this stage of the business, remain undiscovered. For the present it is enough if the reader will admit that the real Helena may step forth, on antique tragedy-Cothurnus, before her primitive abode in Sparta. We then request him to observe in what way and manner Faust will presume to court favour from this royal all-famous beauty of the world.”

In the Second Part we have thus, as Goethe himself tells us, the mind of Faust expanded to wider ranges of thought and feeling than in the First Part. There he had got back youth, and with it the limitations which lack of experience imposes on youth. Here we have the man matured, caring no longer for what merely pertains to him individually. His first effort is to enlarge his outlook by directing it to the highest level that Greek Art had produced in the region of the beautiful. His desire for union with Queen Helena is the symbol of this. The surroundings, too, which Goethe bestows on Faust in this period are representative of what was

unique in the Greek drama. But no mere increase in the kind of pleasure and sense of well-being that attracted the youthful Faust could now suffice for the Faust of mature years. Why this should have become so we shall see as we cease to linger over the *Helena*, and pass, as we now must, to Act IV.

A cloud settles on a rocky mountain. Faust steps forth from this cloud. He is lost in reflection on the beauty of the scene that surrounds him, when Mephistopheles appears, and begins to express aversion to the jagged mountain tops which, he declares, remind him of hell, where he has got to know their volcanic genesis through intense heat. Faust laughs at him. For Faust, the mountain tops belong to the perfection of nature's work, which would be incomplete without them. The discussion is symbolic of Goethe's own attitude towards current geological theory, and the insistence of Mephistopheles on volcanic convulsions as a Plutonic explanation of all the phenomena around him, makes Faust say :—

Well—'tis remarkable and new,  
To note how devils Nature view.

Mephistopheles declares that it does not matter, though he holds to the opinion that the jagged peaks were cast up by Satanic power. But, however that may be, he appeals to Faust to say whether the magnificent view he now has of the glory of the kingdom of the world does not make him desire power over it. Faust says that it does, but challenges him to divine the true nature of his desire. Mephistopheles suggests the building of a great city, where the people would crowd round and honour Faust, who would live in a castle built in glorious surroundings, with fair women for his companions. Faust smiles contemptuously at the devil, who, somewhat annoyed, asks him whether he wants to possess the moon. No, replies the other, this sphere of earthly toil gives him room, quite enough room, for lofty



deeds, and in these what is accomplished is in itself everything, and the glory nothing. Mephistopheles suggests that at least the poets will in such mere possession of power and riches as he has suggested, proclaim Faust's fame. But the latter sneeringly replies :—

All that is far beyond thy reach,  
How canst thou know what men beseech ?  
Thy cross-grained self, in malice banned,  
How can it know what men demand ?

Mephistopheles gives up the controversy, and expresses his willingness to accomplish whatever Faust desires of him. Faust then says that he has conceived the idea of shutting out the sea from the part of the shore over which its tides and waves are dashing, and of so getting the security from its destructive power which the higher land has. Mephistopheles accepts this task, and tells Faust that an opportunity of getting possession of the necessary shores will shortly arise. There are sounds of martial music. He draws Faust's attention to them. The latter shakes his head, "Who's wise likes not to hear of coming war." His companion then explains to him what has happened. The Emperor of Germany, carried away by the profusion of the paper money with which they had supplied him on the earlier occasion, had given himself up to pleasure and had let his system of government drift accordingly. A great error, observes Faust, for it is only in governing to the highest of the ruler's ability, and in making good government an end in itself, that happiness can be earned by him. Mephistopheles explains that this is just what the Emperor did not do, and that his kingdom has fallen into anarchy. A party has arisen which demands his deposition in favour of a new Emperor who will give to the country tranquillity. Rebellion was organized and has resulted in civil war. A battle is impending between the forces of the old and the new Emperors. If Faust will agree he, Mephistopheles, will bring victory to

the old Emperor, and the reward for this assistance will be a grant to Faust of the seashores which he needs for his new plan.

In the second scene the Emperor, after being nearly defeated, is rescued by the magical reinforcements and operations which Mephistopheles has brought to his aid. But in the third scene the joy of the Emperor is marred by the advent of his Archbishop, who reproaches him for having accepted assistance from Satan, and explains that nothing can wash out this stain of sin excepting a grant of land on a very large scale to the Church. The Emperor assents, but somewhat sadly. The Archbishop, however, complains that he has discovered that part of the land which the Emperor is ready to promise to the Church has already been bestowed on the notorious Faust, namely the coast. But this, rejoins the Emperor, is not anything that belongs to the land, for it is actually covered by the sea.

In Act V. we find the culmination of the entire story. For it exhibits the attainment of the goal of what is the highest ideal of all the strivings of Faust through the periods, not only of Part II., but of Part I. The Act opens with a minor tragedy, minor in its relation to the rest of the narrative, but fraught with much significance.

An old couple live in a little house with a chapel by it, on a hill on the sea-border. All around them, as the result of Faust's planning, the sea has been dammed back from the coast, and the reclaimed soil is inhabited by a contented people, who are secure if, but only if, they daily watch the dams that have been constructed, and keep them in careful repair. But the best outlook on their work is to be had from the little hill which is occupied by the old couple, and Faust is consumed by the desire to acquire it as a place for observation. He tries to induce them to move, but they will not go. Mephistopheles is, of course, ready with a suggestion. They may be transported by his myrmidons to an even more

pleasant dwelling without their being aware of what has been done. Faust assents. Mephistopheles instructs the myrmidons. They proceed to try to evict the old people and a guest they have with them, and to pull down the little house. The latter resist, the house takes fire, and all three perish in the flames. When Faust learns of this he is heart-broken. He had intended them no evil, and had believed that he was making them really happier. His palace is approached in the darkness by four spectral woman-forms, Want, Guilt, Necessity, and Care. The first three can gain no entrance, but the fourth, Care, succeeds. Faust is full of contrition. He soliloquizes:—

Not yet have I my liberty made good ;  
 If I could banish magic's fell creations,  
 And totally unlearn the incantations,  
 Stood I, oh Nature, man alone in thee,  
 Then it were worth one's while a man to be.  
 Ere in the Obscure I sought it, such was I,  
 Ere I had coursed the world so wickedly.

Care threatens him, but he defies her. In the result she breathes in his face, and he finds himself blind. He has attained his hundredth year. This is a sufficient expiation for the deed, done with a good but unjustifiable intention, and his spirit is now undaunted. He has triumphed:—

The night seems deeper now to press around me,  
 But in my inmost spirit all is light,  
 I rest not till the finished work has crowned me ;  
 God's word alone confers on me the might.

He bids workmen set to the task of clearing the rest of the coast without delay and of damming back the ocean. Mephistopheles summons the Lemures from Hell, and instructs them to dig, not the trenches Faust has asked for, but Faust's own grave. Faust bids them work strenuously at the reclaiming of the land, and accomplish his purpose:—

To many millions let me furnish soil,  
 Though not secure, yet free to active toil.



He believes that this is being accomplished, and he bursts forth in what prove to be his dying words :—

Yes, to this thought I hold with firm persistence,  
 The last result of wisdom stamps it true,  
 He only gains and keeps his life and freedom,  
 Who daily has to conquer them anew.  
 Thus here, by dangers girt, shall glide away,  
 Of childhood, manhood, age, the vigorous day.  
 And such a throng I fain would see  
 Stand on free soil among a people free.  
 Then dared I hail the Moment fleeting,  
 Ah, still delay, thou art so fair.  
 The traces cannot, of mine earthly being,  
 In aeons perish—they are there,  
 In proud forefeeling of such lofty bliss,  
 I now enjoy the highest Moment—this.

He sinks back, dead. Mephistopheles comes forward—"It is finished." But the Chorus exclaims, "It is past." "Past!" rejoins Mephistopheles, "a stupid word, why past?"

He summons Hell to approach and seeks to seize the dead man's soul. But as Hell ascends, Heaven descends. A host of angels shower roses on the devils, which burn and drive them back into the pit from which they came. The angels now fill the entire space, and Mephistopheles, cursing them, is himself driven back, while the angels bear away to Heaven Faust's immortal soul. In the final scene of Act V. the angels declare that "who'er aspires unweariedly is not past redeeming," and Faust presently appears above, exclaiming that "Free is the view at last, the spirit lifted." He is greeted by the spirit of Gretchen, like himself among the redeemed, and the tragedy closes with a mystic chorus which no translation can render :—

Alles Vergängliche  
 Ist nur ein Gleichniss.  
 Das Unzulängliche,  
 Hier wird's Ereigniss ;  
 Das Unbeschreibliche  
 Hier ist es gethan ;  
 Das Ewig-weibliche  
 Zieht uns hinan.

In the Second Part of *Faust* Goethe reveals himself constantly, but much less directly than in the First Part. As the outcome of this the Second Part needs closer study. But the study repays itself. For it discloses to the patient reader the wisdom of the great critic of life, of an old man full of insight, with wide views about the nature of things, and of tremendous individuality and consciousness of power. The old age of Goethe has left its traces in the difficulties of the text, and in the tendency to an excess of symbolism. Thus the poem must have the close study which it necessitates if it is to be fully appreciated. No doubt this is a drawback. But it is impossible to accept as sufficient the judgment of Mr. Lewes, who, in the chapter of his "Life of Goethe" which he devotes to the Second Part of *Faust*, finds it to be "of mediocre interest, very far inferior to the First Part, and both in conception and execution an elaborate mistake." Carlyle, in his veneration for Goethe, may have gone too far in the opposite direction. But the fact seems to remain, as one beyond dispute, that the Goethe who wrote the Second Part was a Goethe with a larger and richer mind than the younger Goethe who wrote the First Part. The poetry as poetry is doubtless more full of defects. There is what may be called "padding" even in the First Part, and there is certainly much more in the Second. There is little or no "padding" in Shakespeare. There is much in Walter Scott, and its presence ought surely never to be accepted as in itself conclusive against otherwise great literature. For what conclusively makes a poem like *Faust* great is the height touched in it. Now the heights touched in the Second Part are very lofty. In conception the drama is of a splendid order. So it is in the range and insight apparent in its execution. It has the defects referred to. But these very defects are the outcome of its character. They are due to the poem having been the work not of a young man but of an old man,

working intermittently. But then none but an old and enriched mind could have conceived and written it.

Because Goethe was essentially a thinker his mode of thinking must dominate his art. This is not a good thing from the point of view of art as such. But then the tragedy of *Faust* is more than a work of art. It contains a great system of thought. It inculcates a view of life and of religion which, whether complete or not, is one of the greatest that has ever been given to the world. The poetry is the richest of reflective poetry. Inasmuch as it is so, it is inseparable from the author's other work. It cannot be distinguished from his personality. Now the personality of Goethe is in itself extraordinarily instructive. Its story resembles in many points the story of Faust himself, and in none more than in the unceasing but unrelenting effort at self-redemption that characterizes it. For Goethe this was a sustained and enduring effort. His purpose was followed out despite all adverse circumstances, "ohne Hast, ohne Rast." When he enjoins, as the supreme maxim of life, "Stirb und werde," he is saying something with a meaning different from the Pauline injunction of dying to live, as ordinarily interpreted.

Stirb und werde.  
Denn solange du nicht hast,  
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast  
Auf der dunkeln Erde.

With these words of Goethe we must read as their context the dying exclamation of Faust :—

He only gains and keeps his life and freedom,  
Who daily has to conquer them anew.

For Goethe the duty of dying to live seems in this light to mean a sustained effort continuous through the whole of life, and its result is for him freedom of the spirit to be attained within this life, and by no other means. In their conceptions of dying in order to come to a higher life Matthew Arnold



insists that Goethe and St. Paul were really at one, for in his "St. Paul and Protestantism" he cites the passage quoted as testimony "from an unsuspected witness, assuredly, to the psychological and scientific profoundness of Paul's conception of life and death." He may be right, but, if he is, St. Paul was teaching something different from what has been currently attributed to him. And this raises the whole question of whether Goethe was a distinctive Christian, and whether the doctrine of the Second Part of *Faust* is truly Christian doctrine.

The answer, of course, depends on what is understood by Christianity. If the redemption of man is to be looked on as necessarily a sudden process, or as something which has taken place apart from his own freely exercised striving after it; if, in other words, it is to be conceived as Calvin and most Puritans have conceived it, then Goethe was not of their faith. But there may be more aspects than one of the great fact of redemption with which St. Paul and Goethe deal, and if so they may have been at times nearer to each other than is generally supposed. The subject is much too large to have more than passing attention drawn to it here. What is clear is that Goethe meant to represent man as recognized in the *Prologue in Heaven* to possess latent within him a quality of which the Devil did not dream, and, in accordance with the underlying thought of the Second Part of the tragedy, to be able to work up this potentiality, due to his being fashioned in the likeness of God, into its fruition. Yet it was clearly to this spiritual quality in man's nature, to a gift given by God Himself, that man owed his capacity, the capacity which implied a power to renounce self. The principle is one which is expressed by Goethe over and over again in other poems than *Faust*. In *Das Göttliche*, an ode published in 1783, he bursts forth with words of inspired emphasis:—

Nur allein der Mensch  
Vermag das Unmögliche ;

Er unterscheidet,  
 Wählet und richtet ;  
 Er kann dem Augenblick  
 Dauer verleihen.

Und wir verehren  
 Die Unsterblichen,  
 Als wären sie Menschen,  
 Thäten im Grossen,  
 Was der Beste im Kleinen  
 Thut oder möchte.

In the little volume published by Dr. Vogel, *Goethe's Selbstzeugnisse*, the reader will find a carefully made collection of his declarations on the subject of his own religious faith in this sense. It is this faith that really comes to expression in *Faust*. But for Goethe religion was not, taken by itself and in abstraction, sufficient to absorb the whole of the highest capacities of man. If this fundamental principle of his interpretation of man is borne in mind, the Second Part of *Faust* becomes less difficult to understand, and its form becomes less baffling.

Wilhelm Gwinner, an accomplished critic, who was also the interpreter of Schopenhauer, concludes his book on Goethe's *Faust-idee* with a passage which is perhaps worth translating before closing this chapter. He has presented a view of the poet's aim in the idea of Faust differing in certain points from that of these pages. But he says something which, for a German who is proud of Goethe, is true of the work of the latter with whatever differences in stress it is interpreted. "Of this" [the real idea of Faust] "Germany, as the home of the Faust legend, may well be proud. But it is really related to the current notions about Faust much as Philosophy is related to History and to the false national feeling which finds satisfaction in it. The object of Tragedy, writes Lessing, in agreement with Aristotle, is far more philosophical than the object of History, and it is to strip it of its true value if we look on Tragedy as mere panegyric on famous men, or as a

means of feeding the national pride. Such a misuse of the greatest work of her greatest poet posterity will blame in the Germans, in that they have looked on *Faust* as a mere picture of the age as much as an ideal of the Time-spirit, or as their own national ideal of life."

But to Goethe himself it is due if his country has fallen into the error which Gwinner speaks of. For he was a German through and through just as Shakespeare was an Englishman through and through. True he belonged to the old Germany that laid more stress on "the wonderful might of thought" than on national expansion and war. The Germans of his day were a "Lernvolk" that had not yet begun to desire to be changed into a "Thatvolk." But in his case, unlike that of Shakespeare, we fortunately have so much minute information about the details of his life, that we can do him justice by being conscious of the effect of his surroundings on his development. If the student wishes to see what these surroundings meant for Goethe, he has only to turn to two recent books, both published in 1910—Edward Engel's *Goethe, Der Mann und das Werk*, and Wilhelm Bode's *Charlotte von Stein*.

Even just before the outbreak of the war Goethe was being extensively studied in Germany. The reason was that his quality and range satisfied the best in the mind of a people that by nature is both diligent in study and highly educated. It may be that the unexpected call to build herself up in a new fashion that has come to Germany, as the outcome of failure in an enterprise wholly foreign to the spirit of Goethe, will make Germany turn still more towards him, and hold more closely to what he sought to teach mankind. If this be so, he may prove to be still a wise counsellor for the German nation.



## CHAPTER XXXIX

### LAST MONTHS—CONCLUSION

July, 1831—March, 1832

AFTER the completion of the Second Part of *Faust* in the summer of 1831, Goethe was to see only one other birthday, and with it are associated two interesting incidents. The one was a congratulatory communication which moved him deeply. It was a birthday letter subscribed by fifteen Englishmen, which, prompted and written by Carlyle, expressed their debt to him as a spiritual teacher. The letter was accompanied by a seal designed by Mrs. Carlyle, on which was engraved the serpent of eternity enclosing a star with Goethe's own words, *Ohne Hast, ohne Rast*, inscribed. Goethe acknowledged the gift in these characteristic lines <sup>1</sup> :—

Worte, die der Dichter spricht,  
Treu in heimischen Bezirken,  
Wirken gleich, doch weiss er nicht,  
Ob sie in die Ferne wirken.

Britten ! habt sie aufgefasst ;  
" Thätigen Sinn, das Thun gezügelt ;  
Stetig Streben ohne Hast,"  
Und so wollt ihr's denn besiegelt.

For some years it had been Goethe's habit to leave Weimar on the occasion of his birthday to

<sup>1</sup> As the lines were first printed, they were entitled : "*An die neunzehn Freunde in England.*" There were only fifteen signatories : among them were Southey, Procter, Heraud (of *Fraser's Magazine*), Professor Wilson, John Carlyle, Lockhart, Lord Francis Leveson Gower, Moir, Jerdan (of the *Literary Gazette*), Maginn, Fraser (of the *Foreign Review*), Churchill (translator of *Wallensteins Lager*). Lewes includes Wordsworth's name.

avoid the excitement connected with its celebration. On this the last occasion he chose as his retreat a spot where he had often found repose—the village of Ilmenau in the Thuringian Forest. He had first made acquaintance with the place in July, 1776,<sup>1</sup> the second year after his settlement in Weimar, and he had frequently visited it at subsequent periods. Many memories, pleasant and painful, were associated with the spot. There he had hunted with the Duke and shared in escapades, the memory of which still lives in the neighbourhood; there he had dreamed of Frau von Stein and addressed to her passionate poems and letters charged with the conflicting emotions with which his love for her tortured him; and on the walls of the hut, which crowned the summit of the Kickelhahn, he had inscribed the lines, *Ueber allen Gipfeln*. He had not visited Ilmenau for eighteen years, and on the last occasion it had been in the company of the Duke. Now he went with his two grandchildren, and in a mood coloured by all the memories which the spot suggested. In a letter to Zelter he gave utterance to the thoughts that were awakened in him—the thoughts of now and then. Just as fifty years before, the inhabitants were toiling at their various tasks in connection with the mines which he had himself striven in vain to make a profitable industry. “After so many years one could not but review the past: what had endured, what had vanished. Successes were recalled with heartening; failures remained forgotten without a pang.” On the wall of the hut<sup>2</sup> he read the lines he had written so many years before, and, with tears in his eyes, he murmured the concluding words:—

Warte nur—balde  
Ruhest du auch,

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> It was burnt to the ground in 1870, but was rebuilt on the same place in 1874.

words now charged for him with other emotions than those which first inspired them.

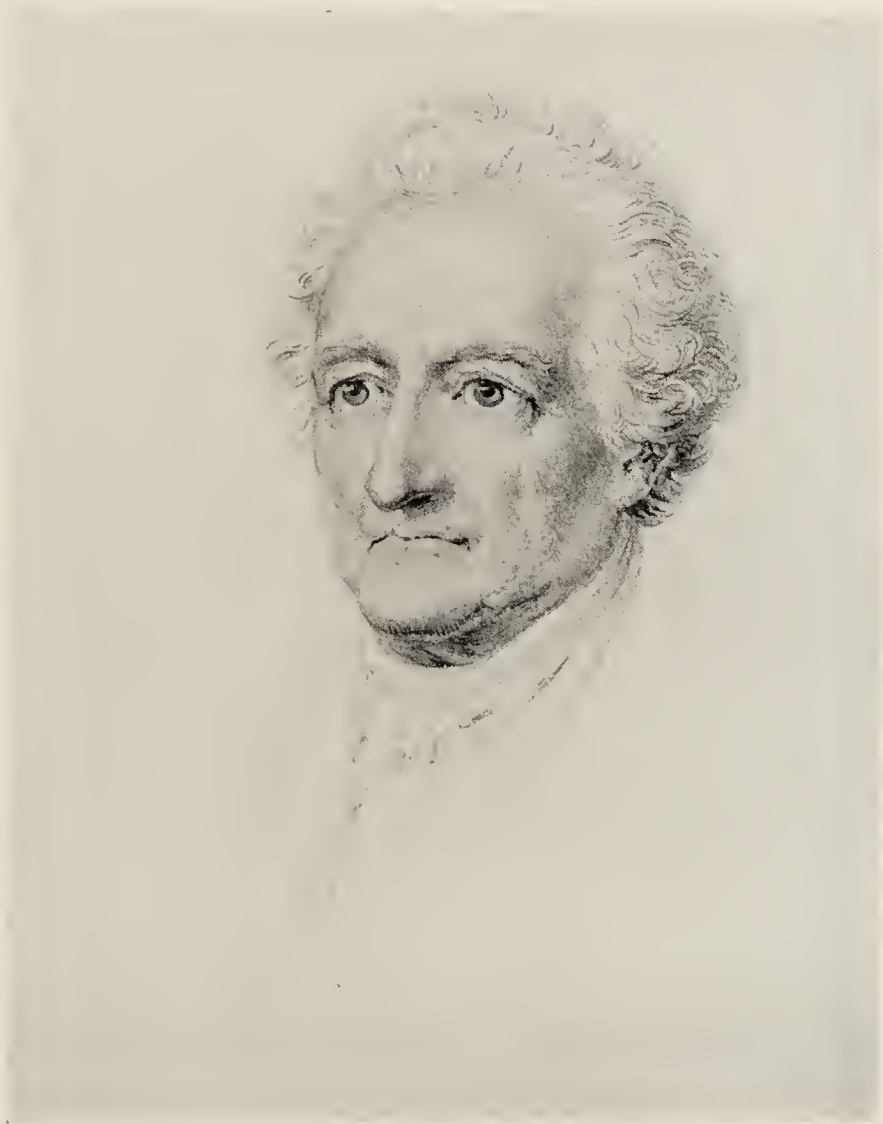
After a stay of six days at Ilmenau he returned to Weimar, which he was never again to leave. "And so forward from the first line to the last"; thus he concluded a letter to Sulpiz Boisserée in the following November, and it was in the spirit of these words that his remaining months were spent. As always, his tasks were various. In the autumn he contributed a paper to a Berlin journal on the controversy between Cuvier and St. Hilaire, rewrote lines in the Second Part of *Faust*, and gave much attention to botany, comparative anatomy, geology, and optics—the sciences which had always chiefly interested him. For consolation and stimulus he characteristically turned to the ancients. One quiet evening he suddenly bethought him of Cicero's *De Senectute*, which hitherto he had never felt inclined to read; he read it now and was charmed by its picture of the old age of noble Romans. Plutarch's lives were read aloud to him in the evenings by his daughter-in-law—the lives of the Greeks and the Romans being taken continuously, and not alternately as Plutarch presents them; for thus, he considered, Greece and Rome might be best compared. The re-reading of yet another ancient writer reawoke and intensified an old enthusiasm. A new edition of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* had just appeared, and in going through it again he was more impressed than ever by Euripides' mastery over his materials and by the consummate skill with which he handles them. With youthful enthusiasm he resolved to give the whole of the ensuing winter to that "incomparable Greek poet," as he calls him.

As his letters and diary show, Goethe began his last year, 1832, in excellent spirits. He had less than three months before him, and almost to the last his days were fully occupied. He wrote another paper, which he finished a short time before his



death, on the subject which dominated every other in his last self-communings—the issue of the controversy between Cuvier and St. Hilaire. In January he read to his daughter-in-law the completed *Faust*, and thereafter put it under seal with directions that it should not be published till after his death. The world, he wrote to Wilhelm von Humboldt in the last letter he dictated (March 17), was “too absurd and confused” to give due consideration to a work of such a nature.

Two days before he dictated this letter to Humboldt (March 15) he was stricken with his last illness. On that day he caught cold in the course of a walk, and the next morning his physician Dr. Vogel found him in bed, feverish and without appetite. During the next three days he was able to move to his study, to read, and even to engage in animated conversation. On the night of the 19th grave symptoms appeared; shivering, accompanied by pain which gradually ascended from the limbs to the chest, and great difficulty in breathing. The following morning Vogel found an alarming change; his features were distorted, his colour ashen-grey, and the pain in the chest was such that he cried aloud. Towards evening his condition improved, and he was able to rise and even to attempt to read a book in which he had been interested. At seven in the morning of his last day (the 22nd) he requested Ottilie to bring him a portfolio of drawings and spoke to her for some time on optical phenomena. All through his illness he talked confidently of his recovery—and he looked forward to the approach of more genial weather which had hitherto never failed to benefit him. In previous illnesses he had been an irritable patient, but in this last illness those in attendance on him were moved by his sweetness and composure, and his anxiety regarding their comfort. Later in the morning he rose and seated himself in an arm-chair by his bedside. During a short sleep he was



GOETHE IN OLD AGE.

[Facing p. 782.]





heard to mutter words indicating that a beautiful female head was floating before him in his dreams. As the forenoon wore on, his mind began to wander, and his thoughts seemed to run on his memories of Schiller. Seeing a scrap of paper on the floor, he asked why Schiller's letters were allowed to lie there. With his forefinger he appeared to trace lines of words in the air—an old habit with him—and he inscribed on the coverlet on his knee what those present took to be the figure of a large W. Shortly after noon the end came. Settling himself in the corner of his chair, he passed imperceptibly away without a struggle. According to one account his last words were addressed to Ottilie: "Give me your little hand," he playfully said to her; according to another, feeling uneasy at the darkness of the room, he said to his servant, "Open the shutters that more light may come in."<sup>1</sup>

As many desired to see the body, it was laid in state, robed in white silk and black velvet, and crowned with laurel. The funeral took place on March 26, and was attended by all the leading personages in the town and Duchy. Twenty-four workmen, representing all the crafts, bore the coffin, which was placed beside that of Schiller in the Grand-Ducal burial vault. In the chapel the choir sang Goethe's own lines, written in 1825 for the Lodge of the Weimar Freemasons and set to music by Zelter.

Lasst fahren hin das allzu Flüchtige !  
Ihr sucht bei ihm vergebens Rat ;  
In dem Vergangnen lebt das Tüchtige,  
Verewigt sich in schöner That.

Und so gewinnt sich das Lebendige  
Durch Folg' aus Folge neue Kraft,  
Denn die Gesinnung, die beständige,  
Sie macht allein den Menschen dauerhaft.

<sup>1</sup> The last words formerly ascribed to him were simply : *Mehr Licht* words which, in the mouth of Goethe, suggested a symbolical meaning.

So löst sich jene grosse Frage  
Nach unserm zweiten Vaterland,  
Denn das Beständige der ird'schen Tage  
Verbürgt uns ewigen Bestand.

In a letter to Carlyle, written in 1837, John Sterling writes as follows: "As to reading, I have been looking at Goethe, specially the 'Life,' much as a shying horse at a post. In truth, I am afraid of him. I enjoy and admire him so much, and feel I could so easily be tempted to go along with him. And yet I have a deeply-rooted and old persuasion that he was the most splendid of anachronisms. A thoroughly, nay intensely pagan life, in an age when it is men's duty to be Christian. I therefore never take him up without a kind of inward check, as if I were trying some forbidden spell."

In his tale, the *Onyx Ring*, Sterling embodied in the character of Walsingham the conception of the German poet to which he here gives expression. He came eventually to take a very different view of the character and work of Goethe, and, in Carlyle's words, put him on the throne of his intellectual world; but the interest of his original view is that, since Goethe first attracted attention in this country, it has been the view of the average cultivated Englishman and precisely on the ground indicated by Sterling—Goethe's "thoroughly, nay intensely pagan life." The aversion of Wordsworth and Coleridge—characteristically English in their feelings and sympathies—had the same origin. Coleridge tells us that he was pressed to translate the First Part of *Faust*; and one of the two reasons he alleges for not undertaking the task was the consideration whether "it became my moral character to render into English, and, so far, certainly, lend my countenance to language, much of which I thought vulgar, licentious, and blasphemous." To Dr. Arnold, another typically English mind, the *Prologue in Heaven* was the expression of a profoundly

un-Christian spirit, to which reverence must be an inaccessible feeling, and in R. H. Hutton's essay on Goethe there is the same fixed aversion as was originally felt by Sterling. There have, indeed, been eminent English critics who have seen Goethe with other eyes. Matthew Arnold, Sir John Seeley, Henry Sidgwick, and Edward Caird—not to speak of his first and most fervent apostle, Carlyle—received him with no such misgivings, and acknowledged him as one of the safest and sagest guides of life. But, in different ways, all these critics were essentially un-English in their cast of thought. "Concerning Goethe," wrote Professor Dowden, "the British public have always had their doubts and scruples." And the general attitude of the English mind to Goethe fully confirms the statement.

It is remarkable that in France Goethe has been regarded with the same hesitations as in England. We might have expected that he would have been received more whole-heartedly by a nation which among its neighbours has the repute of being a Gallio. Moreover, Goethe's personal relations with France were closer; he frankly admitted how much he was in debt to France for the best part of his culture, and he even incurred the reproach of his countrymen by his cordial appreciation of France and her people. Yet it would appear that Sterling's comparison of the shying horse and the post is as applicable on the one side of the Channel as the other. "Geneva" and "Rome," we are told,<sup>1</sup> have been Goethe's steady adversaries in France, and together they have in a large degree determined opinion regarding him. For Lacordaire he was *un mauvais génie*, and Lamennais wrote with special reference to *Faust*: "Je me figure quelquefois que ce grand charlatan entendait à merveille qu'il ne s'entendait pas et riait en lui-même des pauvres nigauds qui se creuseraient un jour la cervelle pour trouver le mot d'une énigme qui n'en a point." As

<sup>1</sup> F. Baldensperger, *Goethe en France* (1904).



an expression of the attitude of "Geneva," we may take the judgment of Amiel, who, however, like Sterling, eventually came round to Goethe's naturalistic point of view. Goethe, he says, "ignore la sainteté et n'a jamais voulu réfléchir sur le terrible problème du mal. Il n'est jamais arrivé au sentiment de l'obligation et du péché." In France, as in England, it has been with those who have broken with traditional beliefs and sentiments that Goethe has found his account; and his chief believers have been spirits like George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Sainte-Beuve, Renan, and Taine. For Taine, Goethe was "le maître de tous les esprits modernes," and George Sand is equally emphatic in her recognition of his significance. Goethe, she says, "n'était pas seulement un grand écrivain; c'était un beau caractère, une noble nature, un cœur droit, désintéressé."

Even in his own country Goethe has never been generally popular. During his closing years he described himself as "in a perpetual state of conflict" with the younger generation. For many years after his death the attacks of Wolfgang Menzel and Ludwig Börne did much to discredit him with the German public. Subsequently, such denigration as that of Menzel and Börne in great measure ceased, and a succession of enthusiastic students went to the opposite extreme in the excess of their laudation. Yet certain of his most recent German biographers have been constrained to admit that he has never made a wide appeal even to the educated classes among his countrymen. The circle of his admirers, says one,<sup>1</sup> is daily becoming smaller; and another<sup>2</sup> asserts that he has not the favour of the reading public, which finds his romances and dramas tedious. But the course of German history during the last half-century is the all-sufficient evidence

<sup>1</sup> R. Meyer, *Goethe* (1898).

<sup>2</sup> C. Schrenpf, *Goethes Lebensanschauung* (1905).

that the spirit and teaching of Goethe have been least potent among his own people.

It need not create surprise that Goethe has found, and will continue to find, antipathies among various orders of minds. He stands for a definite outlook on men and the world, and no one outlook will satisfy every spirit. Lucretius, Dante, Milton repel or attract, as their attitude to human destiny awakes agreement or disagreement in ourselves. Homer and Shakespeare provoke no such antagonism, because they are identified with no special vision of the meaning of life. Not only, however, had Goethe a message of his own which is unacceptable to many, but there prevail certain conceptions of his personal qualities which adversely affect its interpretation.

"Goethe can never be dear to men," wrote Emerson as a transcendentalist ; and the implication of the remark is that there was some grave defect both in his head and in his heart. As for Goethe's heart, it has to be said that those who knew him best in life were most attracted to him. The devotion of his mother and sister went beyond the devotion of ordinary mothers and sisters, and there is abundant testimony that throughout life he had an exceptional power of attracting friends. Jung Stilling, whom he knew in his youth and to whom he did many kind offices, said that his heart was as great as his intellect, and others bore the same witness in almost the same words. On his arrival in Weimar, Wieland at once took him to his heart, and, though difference of opinion subsequently made their intercourse less intimate, they remained friends to the last. The bond between him and Schiller was primarily intellectual, but his memories of Schiller were of the heart as well as of the mind. Knebel, who was his friend for over fifty years, described him as "the best of men, the most lovable of mankind," and Zelter's devotion to him was such that he could not survive him. In his youth and his old age

children delighted in him and he in them—the most evident proof that he could have been neither cold-hearted nor a pedant. We may conclude, therefore, that his philosophy, such as it was, did not proceed from the lack of kindly human qualities.

Moreover, he possessed certain other qualities which men rate high in their estimate of their fellows; sincerity, candour, and plain dealing were eminent characteristics of his nature. Even the ordinary forms of conventional expression were repugnant to him and he could not bring himself to write a letter which did not express what he really thought and felt. He was singularly free from all pettiness of spirit. Herder, not a genial observer, said of him to Schiller: "He is untainted by any spirit of intrigue; he has never knowingly persecuted any one, or undermined the happiness of others." One characteristic he possessed which implies a natural magnanimity of mind; envy of the gifts or reputations of others was a sentiment which he did not know. During his association with Schiller, when Schiller's fame was overshadowing his own and mischievous persons were seeking to stir up jealousy between them, his only feeling was satisfaction that his friend had struck the path in which his genius found its freest and fullest development. Devoid of vanity as of envy, he was fully aware of his own endowments and of the value of the work he had given to the world, but it was his habitual attitude to regard himself as simply an organ of nature through whom she communicated certain truths to the world. He uniformly disclaimed what is called originality, and insistently proclaimed his debt to the labours of others, past and present; on no theme does he speak with more cutting irony than on the pretensions of such as arrogate independence of other men's thoughts.

The qualities just enumerated were undoubtedly his, and they are qualities that evoke the affection and esteem of men. Yet, how is it that such



divergent views prevail regarding one about whom we possess ampler information than about any other of the world's great men ? Of his life, from birth to the grave, we have details so full and precise that he is ever before us as a living personality, acting or acted upon by the successive influences by which he was surrounded. From the testimonies of friends and foes, from his own set productions, from his voluminous letters and journals, we have a portrait of a human being with his moral, mental and physical characteristics in their totality, such as, we might think, should have left no room for doubt regarding the manner of man he was. As Seeley has remarked, "we may almost say that Goethe has compensated to mankind for its almost total loss of the biography of Shakespeare." Yet, doubtless, the very abundance of the information we possess is one cause of the diverse impressions he makes on different minds.

But with Goethe it is not only the wealth of material that is baffling ; in his character and genius there is an elusiveness of which he was himself aware and which struck every observer. "In some respects I am a chameleon," he wrote of himself when he was in his fifteenth year. "Is my Alexis to be blamed, then, if he has not studied all my phases ?" Writing of him at the age of twenty-five, Fritz Jacobi said : "Goethe is as one possessed and almost never has any choice as to what he shall do." Again, Felix Mendelssohn, who saw him about a year before his death, declared, as we have seen, that the world would one day come to believe that there had been not one but many Goethes. And this Protean nature was in exact correspondence with his physical organization. The massive head and bust presented in his later portraits suggest the frame of an athlete impervious to the influences that disturb the equilibrium of less robust constitutions. In point of fact, not Shelley himself was more sensitive to "skiey influences" than

Goethe. Though he had a powerful frame, his organs were peculiarly subject to disorder; and both as a young man and as an old one he had frequent illnesses which nearly proved fatal. A clouded sky, a low barometer, paralysed his creative force, and in his later years he had to await the inspiration of the returning sun. His effervescence of spirit during his two years' sojourn in Italy—the only really happy period of his manhood, as he so frequently declared—was due as much to its climate and skies as to its treasures of art.

In his human relations he was equally sensitive. A particular cast of expression, a particular shade of manner in those with whom he came in contact, formed a barrier to intercourse which he was unable to overcome.<sup>1</sup> Despite his expressed contempt for popular opinion he felt all unsympathetic criticism keenly; and the cold reception of the works he produced after his return from Italy, threw him into permanent depression. Moreover, he was frequently visited at all periods of his life by moods which he himself recognized as morbid. In the case of the greater trials of life he gave way to emotions which for the time unmanned him. His friends shrank from telling him of the deaths of Schiller and of his own son, and during the last illness of his wife his conduct was that of one distracted. Such was the physical and mental temperament of the man whose external appearance and demeanour in his later years suggested the carriage of a god, to whom "the sense of tears in mortal things" was but a stimulant to æsthetic and philosophic contemplation.

With such a temperament, how was Goethe able to subdue himself to the steady and persistent purpose which seems as apparent in him in the passionate period of his youth as in the calm of mature age? Once and again it appeared as if he were about to make shipwreck in the tumults

<sup>1</sup> It was noted above that he was put out by persons wearing spectacles.

of passion; yet he always emerges victorious, apparently only invigorated by the troubles he has passed through. Certain expressions of his own suggest an explanation which, with all the facts of his life before us, we can hardly accept without large reserves. As he represents himself, it would appear that in seasons of apparently the most complete self-abandonment, he retained his power of self-control, and could still the raging sea within him by sheer force of will. But do the accounts we possess of his personal experiences and of his creative activity suggest that he was at all times his own master, equally in relation to his fellows and to his imaginative production? Was he able to say at any moment, "I will pursue this path of conduct, or follow this artistic ideal and none other," and then abandon it when it seemed good to him? As we should expect from his physical and mental characteristics, the impression we receive is precisely the contrary, the more closely we follow his personal conduct in the passionate experiences of his life and in the successive phases of his intellectual development. It is an illusion common to the greatest as well as to the most ordinary of mortals that they are determining their own choice of alternatives when they are only following their nature's imperious instincts. Such instincts were all-commanding in Goethe, as they must be if genius in any of its forms is to find its full expression. What, indeed, strikes us most forcibly in Goethe is the lack of controlling will when he comes into conflict with the instincts implanted in him. Those who knew him best noted this characteristic; Schiller recognized a feminine strain in his nature, and Knebel said that he "was very susceptible to the opinion of others when passion had not mastered him."

Equally in the conduct of his life and in the applications of his genius we see his inability to repress the susceptibility which was the dominating



characteristic of his nature. He struggled hard for self-mastery, but again and again, in all periods of his life, he yielded to passions which for the time enslaved him. And he was saved from their consequences, not by the exertion of his will, but by the provision nature had made against impulses which, as he tells us, might have led to moral shipwreck. Along with his susceptibility went the instinct to know and to create, which asserted itself even when passion raged highest in him, and to which he confessed that he owed his mental balance. We see the same characteristics illustrated in connection with his creative activity. His life is strewn with abortive work, begun with enthusiasm and dropped when the original impulse flagged.<sup>1</sup> "Without compulsion," he wrote in his fortieth year, "there is in my case no hope," and in his sixty-second he said, "Usually what I say, I don't do; and what I promise, I don't hold to." The only labours he pursued with patient persistence were those which he expended on physical science, and there it was an irresistible instinct and not a steady exercise of will that impelled him.

The conception of Goethe as an Apollo in his youth and a Jupiter in his old age, serenely triumphing over the weaknesses of his own nature and the adverse circumstances of life, is opposed equally to his own self-revelations and to the testimony of those who had the best opportunities of knowing him. That such a conception of him should have arisen is mainly due to the reports of persons whose individualities for different reasons were repellent to him. He himself tells us that the distant manner which he assumed with uncongenial natures was a result of his weakness and not of his strength. "To be mild," he said, "costs me nothing, while

<sup>1</sup> It may be regarded as another proof of his lack of self-control that (as has been pointed out above) he could not keep out of his longer works, such as *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the Second Part of *Faust*, matter which happened to be interesting him, but which had no relation to the primary theme.

my hardness and harshness are only factitious and for self-defence." His stately reserve, moreover, has been interpreted as the outward expression of an inborn egotism which actuated all his thought and action. Egotism is a charge which, perhaps, one mortal is hardly justified in bringing against another. The charge, however, was made against Goethe in his lifetime, and he was fully aware of it. It is interesting, therefore, to know in what light he himself regarded egotism, and his words may be taken as a statement of the animating principle of all his life's effort.

"The external world," he says, "is so violently commoved that each of us is threatened with being borne along in the whirlpool; here he sees himself forced to satisfy his own needs, directly and instantly to give his care to the needs of others; and then he asks himself whether he possesses any ability to fulfil this importunate duty. Nothing remains but to say to ourselves that only the purest and strictest egotism can save us; but this must be a self-conscious, clearly and calmly expressed resolve. Let a man ask himself for what he is most good, in order to cultivate it to the best of his ability in and with reference to himself. Let him regard himself as an apprentice, as a journeyman, as an experienced journeyman, and, finally and with the highest degree of caution, as master. If he only know with judicious modesty to extend the demands of the outer world along with the growth of his own capacities, in order to ingratiate himself with it by the use of it, he will gradually attain his end, and, if successful in reaching what is highest, be able to work with comfort to himself." <sup>1</sup> Thus, according

<sup>1</sup> To much the same purport as this passage is Aristotle's description of the mind of his "good man." "For the good man is of one mind with himself, and desires the same things with all his soul, and wishes for himself what both is and seems good, and does that (for it is characteristic of him to work out that which is good) for its own sake—for the sake, that is to say, of the rational part of him, which seems to be a man's self."—*Nic. Ethics*, F. H. Peters' translation. Cf. Seneca, "Qui sibi amicus est, scito hunc amicum omnibus esse."—*Epist.* 6.

to Goethe, in mutual services between self and the world, both parties are most richly benefited—a conclusion which can hardly be contested.

As we should expect from his mobile temperament and manifold interests, a hard-and-fast religious or philosophic creed was alien alike to his modes of thinking and of feeling. In his attitude to the primal cause of things, as he tells us, he was polytheist, deist, and pantheist according to the point of view from which he chose to regard it. Speculation regarding the absolute he consistently put aside as unprofitable, but, at the same time, he did not ignore it. "I dare not talk of the absolute in a theoretical sense," he said. "I may remark, however, that whoever has recognized it in the appearance and kept it ever before his eyes will derive very great gain therefrom." In accordance with this conviction was his lifelong attitude to the speculative thinkers whose writings he turned over at some temporary prompting. To none of them, not even to Spinoza who made the strongest appeal to him, did he ever give systematic study, though from all of them he drew what helped him in his own line of thinking. In his own reflections on the manifold subjects which he touched, the influence of Plato and Aristotle is more apparent than the influence of any of the modern philosophers.

If strenuous ethical purpose and profound reverence before the supreme reason which he recognized as animating the universe be the marks of a religious nature, then Goethe was essentially religious. Not Milton himself took life more seriously or was more deeply convinced that to write well "in laudable things" rigorous self-discipline was indispensable. "When I am not moral," he said, "I am weak." We have seen how with advancing years he came to regard Christianity with growing sympathy. He spoke of its Founder with reverence as the proclaimer of the gospel of love, the highest that had been given to man—love being the element



in which human nature can alone freely develop its powers. "Abide fast in the bond of earnestness and love; all besides is emptiness and sorrow," was his counsel to Schiller, and it was a counsel on which he insistently dwelt, as most constantly to be borne in mind in dealing with ourselves and with others. Nevertheless, to the last he was divided by a gulf from historic Christianity. The conception of a supernatural will intervening in the affairs of men was repellent to his feeling and inconceivable to his intellect. To the Christian view of human nature and its doctrine of sin, with the necessity for repentance, he was equally antipathetic. Self-renunciation he held to be a necessity as life has to be lived, but it is to be practised, not with the ascetic intention of self-mortification, but as a means of adding to the joy of living. Piety he regarded not as an end in itself, but only as one among other means of attaining the highest culture by the peace of mind it brings; by making it an end itself we run the risk of falling into the peculiarly Christian vice of hypocrisy. In the last analysis, submission, he maintained, is the all-important lesson which any religion can instil into its believers.

In various writings and conversations he has indicated his religious creed, but nowhere, perhaps, more explicitly than in a letter to Sulpiz Boisserée, written a year before his death. "From religious feeling," he wrote, "no man will hold himself aloof; it is impossible for him, however, to contain this feeling within himself, and he, therefore, seeks or makes proselytes. The latter is not my way; the former I have faithfully tried to carry out, and from the creation of the world I have found no confession which I could have accepted in its entirety. Now I learn in my old age of a sect, the Hypsistarians,<sup>1</sup> who, hemmed in by heathens, Jews, and Christians, declared that they would treasure, admire, and honour the best, the most perfect that might come

<sup>1</sup> A Cappadocian sect of the fourth century.

to their knowledge, and, in so far as it must stand in near relations with the Godhead, pay it reverence. Then at once a cheerful light broke on me from a dark age, for I felt that all my life long I had been endeavouring to qualify myself for a Hypsistarian. That, however, costs no little effort, for how comes man, in the limitations of his individuality, to know what is more excellent ? ”

It is a saying of Goethe's own that great men are but human beings on a large scale, with the virtues and vices of ordinary mortals, but in greater volume. That he himself had grave defects of temper and will he was fully aware, and he made frank confession of them. That he had with difficulty managed his own life and had made frequent mistakes in the conduct of it, was, in truth, the very reason why he so incessantly reflected on the varieties of human experience and the lessons it suggests. It was in his dealings with women that his passionate and susceptible nature was most exposed to inconsiderate courses. With hardly a single woman who excited his passion were his relations such as mere right reason would approve, but we may remember that men of like stature and like gifts, Dante, Sophocles, and Plato, were as “great lovers” as he. Moreover, in judging Goethe's relations to women it is just to recall the notions that prevailed regarding the conjugal tie in the society around him. Schiller and Fritz Jacobi, men of the loftiest ideals, indulged in similar irregularities ; and the severest of moralists, Kant, could write this sentence : “The word *conjugium* itself implies that two married people are yoked together, and to be thus yoked together cannot be called bliss.” We may even conjecture that, had Wordsworth retired from Paris to Weimar instead of to the Lake Country, his life might have been less austere.

Certain individual actions of Goethe have done more than anything else to create an unfavourable judgment on his character as a whole. His desertion

of Friederike Brion he himself condemned, but he may at least claim the merit of candour in confessing his blameworthiness, as it is only from his own hand we have the story. Moreover, the manner in which he was afterwards received by herself and her family seems to imply that he had not done her an irreparable wrong. His conduct to another of his loves, Lotte Buff, was strictly honourable, for he desisted from his attentions to her, though after a severe struggle. As he came to recognize, his relations to Frau von Stein were an error of passion, though they may have brought him intellectual gain; but for their subsequent estrangement she had the greater responsibility, as the wife of another and as having greater experience of the world. For no part of his conduct has he been more severely condemned than for his failure to visit his mother except at long intervals, but it is a curious commentary on the world's judgments that Dr. Johnson has escaped censure for the same filial neglect, in his case even less pardonable. We cannot admire Goethe's procuring or sanctioning the dismissal of Fichte from his professorship in the University of Jena, as the opinions Fichte was charged with teaching were no more subversive of existing society than his own. At the same time, it has to be said in his defence that the action he took was imperative in the interests both of the State and of the University. For many persons, both in this country and in Germany, it has been an unpardonable offence in Goethe that he was devoid of the sentiment of patriotism and gave no helping hand to his countrymen in their national uprising against the domination of France. As has been already said, however, Goethe grew up in a period when there was no German nation and when patriotism was non-existent. Moreover, it may be doubted if he would have done better for his own country and the world, had he followed the example of Milton and given the best years of his life to the writing of controversial



pamphlets, the only service he could have performed. For work of such a kind, as he himself knew and candidly owned, he was unfitted alike by temperament and by previous discipline, and it was with considerate deliberation that he chose to persist in the paths he had hitherto followed and to give of his best in the fields which nature had assigned to him.

Those who have made the attempt to form some conception of Goethe's work as a whole will not be disposed to contest the judgment of one of his most stringent critics, Edmond Scherer—that he was “one of the exceeding great among the sons of men.” For productiveness, combined with originality in so many fields, he can hardly be said to have his parallel. His work in science is overshadowed by his work in literature, but it is acknowledged that in science he was a distinguished pioneer. His discoveries of the metamorphosis of plants, of the intermaxillary bone, of the organic connection between the skull and the vertebra, are of high importance in the history of the sciences. His theory of light was mistaken, but by his investigations into the nature of colours he became the founder of physiological optics. In every department of nature-study to which he turned his attention he attained valuable *aperçus*. In geology he independently divined the significance of fossils, and saw the necessity of accepting the existence of an ice age. He was one of the first to urge the erection of meteorological stations, and to advocate the use of museums for teaching. In his scientific conceptions he was ahead of the great majority of the specialists of his time. Almost alone he rejected the teleological view of nature, and in his own researches he had distinctly before him the idea of evolution, though he could not realize it in the fullness of its scope, as subsequently discovered and expounded by Darwin. Be it added that for non-scientific readers his writings on nature and its processes have a peculiar and permanent interest. His heart as

well as his intellect was in all his nature-study, and, seeing her with a poet's as well as with a student's eye, he communicates, as only a poet can, the sense of her being "a living garment," in endless and ceaseless change.

His contributions to the theory and practice of art form a large proportion of his work, as strenuously applied as in the case of science. It is recognized that in this field, also, he fell into errors of fact, due less to his own fault than to the lack of knowledge which was not at his disposal, and that he advanced theories which have not been generally accepted. But what he wrote on the art of antiquity marks one of the epochs through which the moderns have passed in their endeavour to comprehend it. It is, however, by his work in literature that he mainly impresses the world; for his place among the small band of poets who speak to collective humanity may now be considered assured. Of the select company in which he stands he has produced the least perfect works on a large scale, but he has one advantage over them all. Coming latest, he stood on a height, whence he could survey human experience with more comprehensive vision, and he has given to the world a richer store of truths that lighten the ways of men in their "mortal passage."





## INDEX

- ACHILLEYS*, 501, 733  
*Adler und Taube*, 135, 751  
*Aeolsharfen*, 621  
 Alexander, Czar of Russia at Erfurt Congress, 545; at Weimar, 547  
*Alexis und Dora*, 504  
*Allerdings*, 625  
*Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, 471, 475  
 Amiel, Henri F., criticism of Goethe, 786  
*Amyntas*, 504  
 Anatomy, study of, 272, 403, 798  
 Apennines, 327  
 Aristotle, description of a "good man," 793 n.  
 Arndt, Ernst M., on the appearance of Goethe, 579; criticism on him, 595; at Wiesbaden, 596  
 Arnim, Achim von, 532; marriage, 542  
 Arnim, Bettina von, 2 n.; *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kind*, 542 n.; letter from Beethoven to, 576  
 Arnold, Gottfried, *Impartial History of the Church and of Heretics*, 47, 157  
 Arnold, Matthew, opinion of Goethe, 4, 750, 785; of *Der Wanderer*, 102; essay "A French Critic on Goethe," 363 n.; criticism on *Das Märchen*, 434 n.; *Selections from Wordsworth*, 633 n.; opinion of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 694; essay on Scherer, 749; "St. Paul and Protestantism," 776  
 Arnold, Thomas, 2; criticism on the *Prologue in Heaven*, 784  
 Assisi, 327  
*Athenæum*, the, 517, 521, 733  
*Aufgeregten, Die*, 421-433  
*Auf Miedings Tod*, 303  
 Augerau, Marshal, at Weimar, 534  
 Austerlitz, victory of, 531  
 Austin, Mrs., *Characteristics of Goethe*, 537 n.  
 Austria, aggressive policy, 271; negotiations with Prussia, 406; war with France, 415, 531  
 Austria, Emperor of, at Carlsbad, 576  
 Austria, Empress of, tribute to, 573; at Teplitz, 576  
 Austria, Marie Louise, marriage, 576  
 BALDENSPERGER, F., *Goethe en France*, 785 n.  
*Ballade*, 611  
 Basedow, Johann Bernhard, at Frankfort, 166; characteristics, 167; at Ems, 167; aversion to the dogma of the Trinity, 168; voyage down the Rhine, 169, 595; at Mülheim, 170 n.  
*Bäume, An meine*, 289  
 Bautzen, defeat at, 578  
*Beaumarchais, Mémoires de Pierre de*, 147  
 Beaurepaire, Commander, surrenders Verdun, 417; shoots himself, 417  
 Beer, Michael, *Der Paria*, 628 n.  
 Beethoven, Ludwig von, composes music for *Egmont*, 356 n., 576; meeting with Goethe, 576  
 Behrisch, influence on Goethe, 28; correspondence with him, 28, 30  
*Bekehrte, Die*, 507  
*Belinden, An*, 185, 187  
 Berendis, Hieronymus Dieterich, 515 n.  
 Bergmann, *De attractionibus electivis*, 558 n.  
 Bergson, M., article in the *Hibbert Journal*, extract from, 129 n.  
 Berka, 582, 591  
 Berlichingen, Gottfried von, drama on, 89-93

- Berlin, 248  
 Bernstoff, Countess von, 628  
 Berthier, Alexandre, at Erfurt, 546  
 Biedermann, 56 n., 59 n., 72 n., 104 n.,  
 112 n., 165 n., 166 n., 173 n., 174 n.,  
 199 n., 202 n., 209 n.  
 Bielschowsky, *Goethe*, 132 n.  
 Blücher, Marshal von, at Carlsbad,  
 607  
 Blumenbach, Johann F., Professor of  
 Natural History at Göttingen, 463  
*Blumenmädchen, Der neue Pausias*  
*und seine*, 504  
 Bode, Wilhelm, *Charlotte von Stein*,  
 778  
 Boerhave, Hermann, 47; *Institutes*  
*of Medicine and Aphorisms*, 47  
 Bohemia, 573  
 Böhme, Frau, 24; influence on  
 Goethe, 26; death, 29  
 Böhme, Prof., 24  
 Bois, H. C., impressions of Goethe,  
 177  
 Bois-Raymond, criticism on Goethe,  
 513 n.  
 Boissérée, Sulpiz, interviews with  
 Goethe, 574; collection of pictures,  
 592; tour with Goethe, 596; at  
 Weimar, 651; letters from Goethe,  
 781, 782, 795  
 Bologna, 327  
 Bonaparte, Louis, King of Holland,  
 46 n.  
 Bonn, 169  
 Börne, Ludwig, attacks on Goethe,  
 497, 786  
 Bosanquet, B., *Suggestions in Ethics*,  
 692 n.  
 Boswell, James, compared with  
 Eckermann, 619; characteristics,  
 620; *Life of Johnson*, 620  
 Botany, study of, 273  
*Bourbon-Conti, Mémoires historiques*  
*de Stephanie-Louise de*, 494  
 Bradley, A. C., *Appearance and*  
*Reality*, 692 n.  
*Braut von Corinth, Die*, 505  
 Brenner Pass, 324  
 Brenta, the, 326  
 Brentano, Bettina, 541; relations  
 with Goethe, 542; marriage, 542.  
*See Arnim*  
 Brentano, Clemens, 532 n.  
 Brentano, Peter, 137, 541, 564  
 Breslau, 406  
*Brief des Pastors*, 122, 163  
 Brion, Friederike, relations with  
 Goethe, 70-74, 182 n., 663; at  
 Strassburg, 72; deserted by Goethe,  
 86, 723, 746, 797; meeting with  
 him, 257  
 Brocken, the, 245; ascent of the,  
 247  
 Brown, Prof. Hume, death, v., 748  
 Brücker, J. J., *History of Philoso-*  
*phy*, 410  
 Bruno, Giordano, 577 n.  
 Brunswick, Duke of, invasion of  
 France, 417  
 Buff, Charlotte, relations with  
 Goethe, 108-111, 117, 664, 797;  
 marriage, 117  
 Buffon, G. L. L., *Les Epoques de la*  
*Nature*, 262, 273  
*Bürgergeneral*, 429-431  
 Bürger, G. A., interview with  
 Goethe, 474  
 Burns, Robert, estimate of, 631  
 Byron, Lord, character, 19; *Corsair*  
*and Lara*, 612; influence on  
 Goethe, 632; criticisms on, 633;  
 stanzas from, 634; letters to him,  
 634  
 CAGLIOSTRO, the arch-charlatan, 279,  
 297, 337 n., 427  
 Caird, Edward, opinion of Goethe,  
 785  
 Calderon, *The Steadfast Prince*, 533,  
 540  
 Calvert, George, on the appearance  
 of Goethe, 639  
 Campbell, Thomas, estimate of, 631  
 Capri, 338  
 Capua, 336  
 Carlsbad, 284, 526, 532, 539, 543, 573,  
 575, 576; conference at, 617  
 Carlsruhe, 200  
 Carlyle, Mrs., seal designed by, 779  
 Carlyle, Thomas, vii., 305; trans-  
 lation of *Das Märchen*, 434;  
 "Von dem Berge zu den Hügeln,"  
 626; *Wilhelm Meister*, 635, 696,  
 702, 704; criticism of it, 688 n.,  
 693; translation of *Faust*, 765;  
 essay on the *Helena*, 766; birthday  
 letter to Goethe, 779; opinion of  
 him, 785  
 Cassel, 464  
 Catania, 337  
 Cellini, Benvenuto, translation of his  
 autobiography, 482, 508-510, 660

- Cento*, 327  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Parson's Tale*, 147 n.  
 Chinese literature, study of, 590, 656  
*Chinesisch - Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, 656  
 Chuquet, Arthur, 418 n.  
 Cicero, *De Senectute*, 781  
*Claudine von Villa Bella*, 193-195, 306 n., 340  
*Clavigo*, 147-153  
 Clodius, Prof., 24; criticism on the poems of Goethe, 34  
 Coblenz, 169, 420  
 Coleridge, A. W., translation of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 662 n.  
 Coleridge, S. T., *Fire, Famine and Slaughter*, 631; criticism of *Faust*, Part I., 784  
 Cologne, 170, 172, 595; Cathedral, 172, 574  
 Constance, 345  
 Conybear, Mrs. F. C., 502 n.  
 Cotta, the publisher, 482, 512, 644, 732, 735  
 Coudray, Chief Architect, 637  
 Cousin, Victor, impressions of Goethe, 639  
 Cracow, 406  
 Cranach, Lucas, 537, 592  
 Cuvier, L. C., controversy with St. Hilaire, 654, 781, 782  
 DANTE, Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, 736, 747  
 Darmstadt, 199; *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, 99  
 Darmstadt, Landgravine Caroline of, 225  
 Daru, P. A., at Erfurt, 546  
 Darwin, Charles, discovery of evolution, 798  
 Daudet, A., opinion of *Prometheus*, 133 n.  
 D'Azyr, Vicq, anatomical discovery, 273 n.  
 De Candolle, Alphonse, 646  
 Delavigne, Casimir, *Le Paria*, 628 n.  
 Delf, Mdle., at Frankfort, 197; Heidelberg, 211  
*Dem 31 Oktober 1817*.. 611  
 Dentzner, General, at Weimar, 538  
 De Quincey, Thomas, criticism on *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 664; on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 693  
*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 5, 31, 38 n., 44 n., 55 n., 75 n., 525, 587, 629, 636, 650, 660-666  
 Diderot, Denis, *Le Neveu de Ramcau*, translation of, 508, 510; *Essai sur la Peinture*, 510 n.  
*Divan*, the translation of, 590  
*Divan, West-östlicher*, 590, 593, 596-607-611, 614  
 Dornburg, 646  
 Doudan, X., *Mélanges et Lettres*, 21 n.; criticism of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 693  
 Dowden, Prof., 785  
 Dresden, 406, 579  
 Dryden, John, *Albion and Albanus* 307  
 Duisburg, 420  
 Dumouriez, Commander, at the battle of Valmy, 418  
 Düsseldorf, 420  
 ECKERMANN, Johann P., secretary to Goethe, 1, 14, 35, 143, 146 n., 182 n., 294 n., 432, 444 n., 446 n., 447 n., 450, 461, 485; friendship with Goethe, 618; history, 618; record of Goethe's conversations, 619, 620, 739; compared to Boswell, 619; characteristics, 620; relations with August Goethe, 648; on Goethe's method of writing *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, 696  
*Eckhart, Der treue*, 587  
*Elgmont*, 210, 212, 340, 347-357, 724; criticisms on, 355  
 Ehrenbreitstein, 114  
*Eins und Alles*, 751  
 Einsiedeln, 204  
 Eisenach, 244  
 Elberfeld, 170  
*Elective Affinities*, 314, 558-569; criticisms on, 569  
*Elegies*, Second Book of, 504  
 Emerson, Ralph W., saying of, 77; criticism on Goethe, 666, 687, 787; opinion of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 694  
 Emmendingen, 200  
 Ems, 166, 168, 174  
 Engel, Edward, Goethe, *Der Mann und das Werk*, 778  
*Epimenides Erwachen*, Des, 584-586  
 Erfurt, Congress at, 545



- Ergo bibamus*, 587  
*Erinnerung*, 295  
*Erlikönig*, 293, 294, 751  
*Erste Bekanntschaft mit Schiller*, 440 n.  
*Erwin und Elmire*, 187-189, 306 n.; recast, 195 n., 340  
*Euphrosyne*, 459, 504  
 Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 781; *in Tauris*, 358  
 Everett, Edward, at Weimar, 604 n.  
 FAHLMER, Joanna, 171; letters from Goethe, 182 n., 189 n., 201 n.; marriage, 257, 280. See Schlosser  
 Falk, J. W., 347 n., 537  
 Fan-palm, specimen of, 326, 334  
*Furbenlehre*, 410, 463, 481, 527, 538, 551, 570-573  
 Farie, Robert, 424 n.  
*Fastnachtspiel, Ein*, 125  
*Faust*, Part I., 49, 80, 212-216, 481, 527, 538, 551, 719-747, 750, 752; commentaries on, 740; Part II., 525, 636, 655, 748-778; Act I., 753-757; Act II., 757-761; Act III., 761-769; Act IV., 769-771; Act V., 771-773; translations, 765; defects, 774  
*Faust, ein Fragment*, 727, 735  
 Faustima, liaison with Goethe, 393  
 Ferrara, 327  
 Fichte, Prof. Johann Gottlieb, philosophy, 469; at Jena University, 470, 520; dismissal, 470, 797; opinion of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498; *Wissenschaftslehre*, 521 n., 691  
 Fichtelgebirge, the, 272 n., 274  
 Fischer, K., 726  
*Fischer, Der*, 293, 294  
*Fischerin, Die*, 309  
 Fitzgerald, Edward, *Omar Khayyam*, 518 n.; dislike of funerals, 645 n.  
 Flachsland, Caroline, 99; impressions of Goethe, 100  
 Flaubert, G., opinion of *Prometheus*, 133 n.  
 Florence, 327, 345  
 Fouqué, Baron de la Motte, at Weimar, 581  
 France, war with Austria, 415, 531; Republic founded, 418; peace with Prussia, 538 n., 552  
 Francis, Emperor of Austria, 533  
 Frankfurt-on-the-Main, 1, 22, 44, 80, 113, 205, 256, 415, 457, 591; situation, 2; population, 2; occupied by the French troops, 14, 419; Herrnhut Community, 46; fair at, 207; evacuated, 423; theatre, 458  
*Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 121  
*Frankreich, Campagne in*, 413 n., 414 n., 417 n., 418 n., 429 n., 434, 639  
 Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, 13, 222, 249; criticism on *Götz von Berlichingen*, 313, 583  
 Frederick William, King of Prussia, camp near Breslau, 405; invasion of France, 417; siege of Mainz, 423; entry into Dresden, 579  
 Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, 537 n.  
 French plays, 467, 499; revolution, outbreak, 403 n., 415, 424-427, 487; epigram on, 404; troops occupy Frankfort, 14, 419; evacuate it, 423; occupy Dresden, 579; expelled from Germany, 582  
*Freunde in England, An die neunzehn*, 779  
 Fritsch, Baron von, 643  
 Fromman, bookseller at Jena, 540  
 GALL, Dr., 528  
 Gallitzin, Princess, varied spiritual history, 421; visit from Goethe, 421  
 Garbenheim, 108  
 Garda, Lake, 325  
*Gedichte*, 751  
*Gefunden*, 580  
*Geheimnisse, Die*, 300-302  
 Gellert, C. F., at Leipzig, 23, 24  
 Geneva, 258  
 Geology, study of, 274, 798  
*German Architecture*, essay on, 69, 322  
 German Empire, dissolution, 533  
 Germany, literature, 35, 65, 95, 450, 613; alliance with Prussia, 271; War of Liberation, 570, 582, 589, 600; expulsion of the French, 582  
*Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums*, 611  
*Geschwister, Die*, 311  
 Girgenti, 337  
 Gleim, Ludwig, at Weimar, 243  
 Globe, the, 653

- Glocke, Die*, Epilogue to, 551  
*Glocke, Die Wandelnde*, 587  
 Göchhausen, Luise von, 212 *n.*  
 Godwin, Mary, 385 *n.*  
 Goethe, Frau Aja, relations with her son, 6, 416; characteristics, 6, 544; religious views, 11; opinion of the Duchess Amalia, 223; receives the Duke of Weimar, and her son, 256; refuses to leave Frankfort, 419 *n.*; treatment of Christiane, 457; on the recovery of her son, 462; death, 543; directions for her funeral, 543; affection for her son, 544, 787  
 Goethe, August Walther, birth, 387; godfather, 387; travels, 463, 648; illness, 495; at Heidelberg University, 543; prevented from joining the War of Liberation, 581; marriage, 605; character, 605, 648; relations with his wife, 605; treatment of his father, 623; death, 641, 649  
 Goethe, Cornelia, 7; sympathy with her brother, 8, 85, 118, 438; letters from him, 29, 34; relations with her father, 44; marriage, 119. *See* Schlosser  
 Goethe, Herr, Imperial Councillor, 5; relations with his son, 5, 17, 44, 53, 81, 85, 118; characteristics, 5; scheme of education for his son, 9; aversion to the nobility, 179; opinion of Lili Schönnemann, 198; opposition to his son going to Weimar, 210; mental decay, 256; death, 256 *n.*; interest in *Elmout*, 349  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, birth-place, 1-3; date of his birth, 3; relations with his father, 5, 17, 44, 53, 81, 85, 118; mother, 6; lack of discipline, 7; sister, 7; education, 9, 25; religious views, 10-13, 43, 47, 55-57, 112, 122, 297-300, 303, 576, 628, 775-777, 794-796; influence of certain events, 13-15; visits to the French theatre, 15; relations with Gretchen, 16; at Leipzig University, 17, 24, 218; self-directed development, 18; characteristics, 18, 24, 59, 111, 217, 224, 227, 265, 282, 378, 396-399, 442-444, 637, 788-794; "chameleon" temperament, 19, 25, 45, 218, 746, 789; interest in science, 20, 47, 237, 258, 261, 272, 273, 274, 334, 408, 420, 446, 653, 781, 798; poems, 20, 30, 35, 36, 39-41, 77, 135, 173, 183-186, 203, 208 *n.*, 287-306, 391, 503-507, 587, 611, 621, 625, 647, 656-658, 723, 751; life in Leipzig, 21-42, 663, 720; attends lectures, 25; change in his dress, 25-27; relations with K. Schönkopf, 27-32, 50; influence of Behrisch, 28; of F. Oeser, 33; interest in art, 33, 51, 120, 241, 272, 321-323, 799; plays, 35, 37-39, 187, 310-314, 467; return to Frankfort, 42-53, 80, 113, 174, 196, 205, 256, 415, 424, 457, 591; bodily and mental condition, 42, 43, 81-83; illness, 45, 461, 478, 495, 607, 623, 650, 782; study of literature, 51, 106, 629; at Strassburg, 53-73, 200, 219, 257, 663, 720; Licentiate of Laws, 54, 73, 84; nervous irritability, 56; friendship with Dr. Salzmann, 58; with J. Stilling, 59-61; appearance, 60 *n.*, 227, 398, 443, 550, 603, 639-641, 789; relations with Herder, 61-67; *Götz von Berlichingen*, 66, 68, 80, 83, 89-96, 113, 123, 347; *Faust*, 68, 80, 212-216, 319, 551, 636, 650, 655, 719-747, 748-779; impressions of Strassburg cathedral, 68, 322; essay *On German Architecture*, 69, 322; relations with F. Brion, 70-74, 86, 182 *n.*, 257, 663, 746, 797; at Sesenheim, 70-73, 256; instinct for self-mastery, 74, 75, 87, 242, 249, 262, 264, 294, 322, 792; method of curing his jarred nerves, 75; temperament, 76, 790, 794; *Wilkommen und Abschied*, 78; *Werther*, 80, 83, 105, 116, 136-147, 316-318; *Disputation*, 84; legal cases, 84; panegyric on Shakespeare, 88; friendship with Merck, 97-99; at Darmstadt, 99; *Wanderers Sturmlied*, 101; *Der Wanderer*, 102; at Wetzlar, 105-110; practical jokes, 107, 196 *n.*, 202 *n.*; translation of the *Deserted Village*, 107; relations with C. Buff, 108-111, 117, 664, 797; friendship with Frau von la Roche, 114; relations with Maximiliane, 115, 137; contributions to the *Frankfurter Gelehrte*

*Anzeigen*, 121; *Brief des Pastors*, 122, 163; *Zwei wichtige bisher*, etc., 123; *Das Jahrmaktsfest*, 124; *Ein Fastnachtspiel*, 125; *Satyros*, 126; *Götter, Helden, und Wieland*, 127; *Prometheus*, 128-133; projected drama of Mahomet, 133; wish to commit suicide, 142; *Clavigo*, 147-153; influence of Spinoza, 154-156; *Der Ewige Jude*, 156-160; relations with Lavater, 163, 202; letter to him, 164; at Ems, 166, 168, 174; meeting with Basedow, 167; voyage down the Rhine, 169, 595; dinner at Coblenz, 169; at Elberfeld, 170; meeting with Fritz Jacobi, 171-174; at Cologne, 172, 595; relations with Klopstock, 176; *An Schwager Kronos*, 176; friendship with Major von Knebel, 178, 280; relations with Lili Schönmann, 182-197, 206, 257, 288, 663; correspondence with Countess Stolberg, 186, 198; *Erwin und Elmire*, 187-189, 340; *Stella*, 189-193; *Claudine von Villa Bella*, 193-195, 340; *Lilis Park*, 195 n., 208 n.; at Offenbach, 196, 206; betrothal, 197; travels, 199; last meeting with his sister, 200; at Zurich, 202; tour with Passavant, 202-204; *Egmont*, 210, 212, 340, 347-357, 724; parting with Lili, 211; at Heidelberg, 211; Weimar, 211, 345, 407, 422, 466, 781; *Urfaust*, 212-216, 319, 721-723, 727, 738; relations with the Duke of Weimar, 220, 224, 241, 269; *Ilmenau*, 225, 269-271; relations with C. Vulpinus, 226, 382, 387-391, 476; life at the Court of Weimar, 228-285; presented with a house, 229, 236; relations with Frau von Stein, 231-235, 242, 281-285, 289, 378, 380-387, 797; correspondence with her, 233, 241, 282, 383-385; appointed *Geheimer Legationsrat*, 236, 239; official duties, 238, 256, 259-261, 283, 379; ideal of *Reinigkeit*, 239, 248, 357; Privy Councillor, 239, 255; President of the Council, 240; at Ilmenau, 240, 580, 780; death of his sister, 243; ascent of the Brocken, 247; at Berlin, 248, 583; chief of the War

Commission, 251; retrospect, 252; tour with the Duke of Weimar, 255-259; pet-name, 256; in Switzerland, 257, 458-461; changes his house, 266, 422; diploma of nobility conferred, 266; control of finance, 267; estrangement with the Duke of Weimar, 271, 604; anatomical discovery, 272, 403, 798; *Die Natur*, 275; broken friendships, 277-280, 479; at Carlsbad, 284, 532, 539, 543, 573, 575, 576, 607, 619; breach with Frau von Stein, 285, 335; ballads, 293; *Singspiele*, 307-310; *Wilhelm Meister*, 314-320, 481, 530, 636, 660-694, 695-718, 729; *Italienische Reise*, 323, 336, 392; tour in Italy, 325-336, 338-345, 402; at Rome, 328-335, 339-345; portraits, 329, 330 n., 378 n., 443 n., 646; at Naples, 335, 338; in Sicily, 336-338; sketch of the life of St. Philip Neri, 339; *Iphigenie*, 340, 356-366, 724; lessons in drawing, 341; interest in music, 342; relations with M. Riggi, 343; lack of sympathy from his friends, 377-380, 401; *Tasso*, 366-375, 391, 724, 727; weakness of will, 378, 791; birth of a son, 387; views on marriage, 389; *Roman Elegies*, 392-396, 727; conversion to paganism, 392, 516; liaison with Faustina, 393; *Venetian Epigrams*, 404, 727; at Breslau, 406; *Die Mystifizierten*, 406 n.; Director of the Weimar theatre, 407, 428, 465; on the theory of light, 408-410, 483, 539, 728, 798; character of his philosophy, 412; founds the *Freitagsgesellschaft*, 414 n.; neglect of his mother, 416, 544, 797; joins the allies at Longwy, 416; at the battle of Valmy, 418; at Pempelfort, 420; visit to Princess Gallitzin, 421; on the French Revolution, 424-427, 432; *Der Gross-Cophtha*, 427-429; *Bürgergeneral*, 429-431; *Die Aufgeregten*, 431-433; *Das Märchen*, 434; translation of *Reineke Fuchs*, 435; relations with Schiller, 439-453, 477; interview with him, 441; a realist, 447; correspondence with Schiller, 449-553; at Jena, 455, 540; Stäfa, 458, 459; *Euphrosyne*



459; at Oberrossla, 462, 468; reception at Göttingen, 463, 464; at Pyrmont, 463; *Farbenlehre*, 463, 464, 481, 527, 551, 570-573; manager of the mines at Ilmenau, 465; interest in the University of Jena, 469-471; edits the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, 471; influence of the Humboldts, 472; meeting with Madame de Staël, 475; grief at the death of Schiller, 478; *Epilog zu Schiller's Glocke*, 480, 551; *Hermann und Dorothea*, 481, 486-494, 730; *Die natürliche Tochter*, 481, 494-500; contributions to *Die Horen*, 482, 509; *Literarischer Sansculottismus*, 483; *Xenien*, 483-486; death of his fourth child, 495; *Die Jagd*, 501; *Achilleis*, 501, 733; dramatic sketches, 502; translation of the autobiography of B. Cellini, 508-510; of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 510; the *Propyläen*, 512, 733; æsthetic principles, 513-515; essay *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*, 515-517, 523; relations with the Romantics, 517-524; friendship with Zelter, 526, 530; at Halle, 528; his house the headquarters of the French, 535; marriage, 535; relations with W. Hertzlieb, 540; sonnets, 541; relations with B. Brentano, 542; death of his mother, 543; at Erfurt, 545; interviews with Napoleon, 546, 547; translation of *Mahomet*, 546, 733; Cross of the Legion of Honour conferred, 547 n.; *Pandora*, 551-558; *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, 551, 558-569; life of P. Hackert, 574; at Dresden, 579; Teplitz, 579; on the War of Liberation, 581-583; at Berka, 582, 591; dislike of Prussians, 583; *Vögel*, 583; *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, 584-586; *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 587, 629, 636, 650, 660-666; *West-östlicher Divan*, 590, 593, 596, 607-611, 614; at Wiesbaden, 591, 594; relations with M. Willemer, 594, 597; *Wiederfinden*, 599; Prime Minister, 601; death of his wife, 602; at Tennstädt, 603; *Zahme Xenien*, 614; receptions, 618; friendship with Eckermann, 618;

at Marienbad, 621; relations with U. von Levetzow, 621-623; conduct of his son, 623; *Trilogie der Leidenschaft*, 624; *Paria*, 626-628; judgments on English writers, 630-633; letter from Byron, 634; house, 638; methodical habits, 641; plan of his day, 641; jubilee of his coming to Weimar, 642; last edition of his works, 643; at Dornburg, 646; death of his son, 649; interview with the King of Bavaria, 652; *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 657-659; character of his heroes, 687; lines on his birthday letter from Englishmen, 779; death, 783; funeral, 783; criticisms on, 784-788; sensitiveness to climate, 789; defects of his character, 796; want of patriotism, 797  
Goethe, Ottilie von, 605; relations with her husband, 605; devotion to Goethe, 651  
Goethe, Wolf, 651  
*Goldschmiedsgesell, Der*, 552  
Goldsmith, Oliver, *Deserted Village*, translation of, 107; *Edwin and Angelina*, 188; *Vicar of Wakefield*, 576 n., 631  
Goncourt, Edmond de, opinion of *Prometheus*, 133 n.  
Göschel, the publisher, 285 n., 321, 359 n., 368 n., 392 n., 724  
Gotha, Prince August, 464  
Gothic architecture, 326, 513, 524; origin, 69  
*Gott, Der, und Die Bajadere*, 507  
Götter, F. W., Secretary of the Gotha Legation at Wetzlar, 107; translation of the *Deserted Village*, 107  
*Götter, Helden und Wieland*, 127, 227  
Göttingen, 463, 464  
*Göttliche, Das*, 296, 298, 302, 723, 751, 776  
Gottsched, J. C., at Leipzig, 23  
*Götz von Berlichingen*, 66, 68, 80, 83, 89-93, 113, 121, 425, 520; criticisms on, 93; anachronisms, 94; influence on literature, 95; style, 96; recast, 123  
Grandpré, 419  
Greek literature, 451  
*Grenzen der Menschheit*, 296, 298, 302, 723

- Gretchen, relations with Goethe, 16  
 Grimm, Baron, 464 n.  
 Grimm, Hermann, 598  
 Grimm, Wilhelm, 526; impressions of Goethe, 550  
*Gross-Cophta*, 427-429  
*Gross ist die Diana der Ephesier*, 588  
 Guercino, pictures of, 327  
 Gunther, Court Preacher, 535  
 Gwinner, Wilhelm, *Goethe's Faust-idee*, 777
- HACKERT, Philipp, 341, 573; Life of, 574, 660  
 Haldane, Lord, on Goethe's Second Part of *Faust*, 748  
 Halle, 528; University, 471  
 Hamann, J. G., 62; "Magus of the North," 63; influence on Princess Gallitzin, 421; death, 421  
 Hamilton, Lady, costume, 336  
 Hammer, von, translation of the *Divan*, 590, 597  
 Hanover, 118, 245  
*Hans Sachsens poetische Sendung*, 304  
 Hardenberg, K. A. von, at Weimar, 581 n.  
 Harz mountains, 245, 272 n., 274  
*Harzreise im Winter*, 246, 745  
 Hasenkamp, opinion of *Werther*, 170  
 Haugnitz, Count, at Frankfurt, 198  
 Haym, R., *Life of Herder*, 62 n., 67 n.  
 Hegel, G. W. F., 409 n.; criticism on *Götz von Berlichingen*, 94; impressions of Napoleon, 584 n.; opinion of the *Divan*, 610  
 Hehn, Viktor, 102; *Über Goethe's Gedichte*, 132 n.  
 Heidelberg, 211, 428; University, 543  
 Heilbronn, 458  
 Heine, Heinrich, impressions of Goethe, 651  
 Heinse, Johann J. W., opinion of Goethe, 174  
 Helmont, Jean Baptiste von, 47  
 Herbst, W., *Goethe in Wetzlar*, 107 n.  
 Herder, Frau, 381; impressions of Goethe, 396  
 Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Fragments on Modern German Literature*, 35; career, 61; relations with Goethe, 61-67, 281, 455; characteristics, 62, 63; religious views, 62; toast to, 88 n.; criticism on *Götz von Berlichingen*, 106; on Goethe, 121, 390, 788; letters from Goethe, 198, 285; preacher at the Court of Weimar, 221, 230, 280; *Ideen*, 274; at Carlsbad, 284; criticism of *Tasso*, 372; baptises Goethe's son, 387; at Rome, 401; member of the *Freitagsgesellschaft*, 414 n.; opinion of *Reineke Fuchs*, 436; *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498; *Wilhelm Meister*, 691  
*Hermann und Dorothea*, 481, 486-494, 730  
*Hermann und Dorothea*, elegy, 504 n.  
 Herrnhut Community, Synod of the, 46  
 Hertzlieb, Wilhelmina, relations with Goethe, 540  
 Hesse-Darmstadt, Princess Luise of, betrothal, 200  
 Heyne, C. G., at Göttingen, 463  
*Hibbert Journal*, 129 n.  
*Hoffnung*, 295  
 Hölderlin, impressions of Goethe, 474  
*Horen*, Die, 395, 482, 509; failure, 482, 512  
 Horn, impressions of Goethe, 26-28  
 Howard, Luke, 625  
 Hüber, L. F., criticism of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498  
 Hugo, Victor, *Notre Dame*, 653  
 Humboldt, Alexander von, 472, 479 n.; contributor to *Die Horen*, 482; at Weimar, 548, 581 n., 651; opinion of the *Divan*, 610  
 Humboldt, Wilhelm von, 472; views on marriage, 74; letters from Goethe, 479, 782; contributor to *Die Horen*, 482; opinion of *Hermann und Dorothea*, 489; of *Elective Affinities*, 569; of *Wilhelm Meister*, 688, 691  
 Hutton, R. H., essay on Goethe, 785  
 Hypsistarians, the, 795
- IFFLAND, Auguste W., the actor, 356 n.; Director of the Berlin theatre, 465 n., 582; at Weimar, 465  
*Ihr verblühet, süsse Rosen*, 189 n., 208 n.  
 Ihm, the, 229, 248, 310 n., 582  
 Ilmenau, 240, 272 n., 274, 580, 780; mines at, 246, 261, 379, 465  
*Ilmenau poem*, 225, 269-271, 303  
 Innsbrück, 324

- Intermaxillary bone in man, discovery of, 272, 798  
*Iphigenie*, 313, 340, 356-366, 724; recastings, 359; criticisms on, 364  
 Italian art, plan of a history of, 456, 458, 461, 512, 612  
*Italianische Reise*, 323, 336, 392
- JABACH, picture of, 173  
 Jacobi, Betty, 171  
 Jacobi, Fritz, 132; letters from Goethe, 150, 175, 239, 416; at Pempelfort, 171; meeting with Goethe, 171-174, 420; personality, 172; at Cologne, 173; impressions of Goethe, 174, 789; estrangement with him, 279; romances, 280; at Weimar, 528; criticism of *Elective Affinities*, 566, 569; *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung*, 575, 588 n.; death, 615  
 Jacobi, Georg, 171; at Pempelfort, 172  
*Jagd, Die*, 501  
 Jagemann, Caroline, 465, 604  
*Jahrmarktsfest, Das*, 124  
 Janin, Jules, criticism of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 692  
 Jena, 240, 637; battle of, 536, 538; University of, 223, 379, 455, 469-471, 606; exodus of professors, 471; formation of the Students' Associations, 606; tribute to Goethe, 643 n.  
*Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, 471  
 Jenkins, Mr., 343  
 Jerusalem, commits suicide, 113, 140  
*Jery und Bätely*, 309  
 Johnson, Dr., on broken friendships, 278; treatment of his mother, 416, 544, 797  
*Jude, Der Ewige*, 156-160, 166, 195  
 Jung, Johann Heinrich, 59. *See* Stilling  
 Jung, Marianne, character, 593; relations with Goethe, 594; marriage, 594. *See* Willemer
- KANT, Immanuel, criticism on German literature, 35; views on marriage, 79, 796; *Critique of Pure Reason*, 411; of *Judgment*, 411-413; contributor to *Die Horen*, 482  
 Karsten, play, 604  
*Katzenpastelo*, 587
- Kauffmann, Angelica, meeting with Goethe, 329-331; portrait of, 330  
 Kayser, Philipp Christoph, 307; in Rome, 342  
 Keats, John, 492 n.; extract from his *Letters*, 340 n.  
 Kellerman, F. C., at the battle of Valmy, 418  
*Kennst du das Land*, 292, 751  
 Kestner, A., *Goethe und Werther*, 146 n.  
 Kestner, Johann Christian, characteristics, 109; impressions of Goethe, 111; letters from, 117; marriage, 117; at Hanover, 118, 245  
 Kickelhahn, the, 240, 269, 780  
 Klettenberg, Fraülein von, religious views, 11, 45; character, 46; occult studies, 46; letter from Goethe, 56; meeting with Lavater, 165; illness, 179; death, 180  
 Klopstock, Friedrich Gottlieb, *Messias*, 88, 175; relations with Goethe, 176; at Frankfort, 176, 197; Carlsruhe, 200; admonition of Goethe, 228  
*Knabe, Der untreue*, 173  
*Knaben, Wunderhorn, Des*, 532, 539  
 Knebel, Major von, friendship with Goethe, 178, 280; impressions of him, 179, 264, 378, 390, 397, 787, 791; letters from him, 207, 267; member of the *Freitagsgesellschaft*, 414 n.; criticism of *Elective Affinities*, 569  
 Kniep, J. C., 336  
 Kochberg, 233, 381  
*König von Thule, Der*, 173, 724, 751  
 Körner, C. G., 67 n.; impressions of Goethe, 406, 438 n.; friendship with Schiller, 440; criticism of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498; of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 691  
 Kotzebue, Auguste von, plays, 465, 467; at Weimar, 607 n.; assassinated, 616  
 Kraft, incapacity, 249-251; letters from Goethe, 249, 263  
 Kruger, the actor, 358 n., 692  
*Kunst und Alterthum*, journal, 612, 767  
*Künstlers Erdewallen*, 135
- LA BRUYÈRE, Jean de, saying of, 739, 740



- Lacordaire, Jean B., criticism on Goethe, 785
- Lahn, the, 105, 120, 169
- Lamenais, F. R. de, criticism of *Faust*, 785
- Langer, influence on Goethe, 43
- Lassberg, Christel von, commits suicide, 248, 312
- Lauchstädt, theatre at, 527
- Laune des Verliebten, Die*, 35, 37
- Lavater, Johann Kaspar, 162; *Schweizerlieder*, 162; *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit*, 162; work on Physiognomy, 162, 164 n., 202, 208, 232; characteristics, 162, 167; relations with Goethe, 163, 202; at Frankfort, 164-166; Ems, 166; skill in physiognomy, 168; voyage down the Rhine, 169, 595; at Mülheim, 170; Elberfeld, 170; Zurich, 202; letter from Goethe, 207; influence on the Duke of Weimar, 258; estrangement from Goethe, 278, 460; at Weimar, 279; epigram on, 484
- Le Brun, Charles, picture of Jabach, 173
- Leibniz, 653 n.
- Leidenschaft, Trilogie der*, 624
- Leipzig, 22, 663, 720; the literary centre of Germany, 23; battle of, 580, 582, 606; University of, 17, 218
- Lengefeldt, Charlotte von, marriage, 440
- Lenz, suicide, 744
- Leonardo da Vinci, *Last supper*, 345
- Lerse, 56 n.
- Lessing, Gotthold, *Laokoon*, 35; *Minna von Barnhelm*, 35; criticism on, 51; opinion of *Götz von Berlichingen*, 94 n.; controversy on *Prometheus*, 132; criticism of *Werther*, 145 n.; views on tragedy, 777
- Leuchsenring, intrigues, 115, 125
- Leute, Die*, 588
- Levetzow, Ulrike von, relations with Goethe, 621-623
- Lewes, G. H., opinion of *Götz von Berlichingen*, 94; *Life of Goethe*, 696 n., 774
- Lewis I., King of Bavaria, interview with Goethe, 652
- Lewis, Monk, translation of *Faust*, Part I., 633 n.
- Liberation, War of, 570, 582, 589, 600
- Lido, the, 326
- Lila*, 308
- Lilis Park*, 195 n., 208 n.
- Limprecht, letter from Goethe, 55
- Linnæus, Carl, *Botanical Philosophy*, 273
- Lisbon, earthquake, 12
- Literarischer Sansculottismus*, 3, 34 n., 483
- Lockhart, John Gibson, on the appearance of Goethe, 641 n.
- Loder, Professor of anatomy at Jena, 262, 471; departure, 471
- Loeper, G. von, 658 n., 661 n., 664 n.
- Longwy, camp at, 416
- Louis, King of Holland, 573
- Lowell, Russell, 396
- Luden, H., 586 n.
- Ludwigsburg, 458
- Luther, Martin, 606
- Lützen, defeat at, 578
- Lyncker, *Am Weimarischen Hofe*, 222 n., 236 n.
- MACDONALD, Dr. George, vii.
- Macpherson, James, *Ossian*, 631
- Mahomet, projected drama of, 133-135
- Main river, 2, 597
- Mainz, siege of, 423, 531
- Mainz, Siege of*, 418 n., 629
- Malesine, 325
- Mann von fünfzig Jahren, Der*, 695, 705
- Mannheim, 200
- Mantua, 404
- Manzoni, Alessandro, *Adelchi*, 363; *Carmagnola*, 630
- Märchen Das*, 434, 520; criticisms on, 434
- Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria, 13
- Marie Antoinette, trial, 428
- Marienbad, 621
- Marriage, views on, 389, 566, 569
- Martial, *Zenia*, 483
- Maskenzug zum 30 Januar*, 502
- Masson, Prof., vii.
- Maximen und Reflexionen*, 657-659
- Melusine, Die neue*, 695, 708
- Mendelssohn, Felix, 157 n., 217, 342, 623, 637, 789
- Mendelssohn, Moses, death, 133

- Menzel, Wolfgang, attacks on Goethe, 786
- Merck, Johann Heinrich, impressions of Goethe, 97; characteristics, 98; attitude in criticism, 98; at Darmstadt, 99; leader of the *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, 99; translation of the ballad *Edward*, 100; at Ehrenbreitstein, 114; editor of the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 121; definition of Goethe's genius, 200 n.; letters from Goethe, 207, 230, 241, 248, 261; at Wartburg, 245; estrangement with Goethe, 278; commits suicide, 278 n., 744
- Mercur, the, 391
- Meredith, George, opinion of *Das Göttliche*, 299 n.; *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, 426 n.
- Merimée, Prosper, *Guzla*, 653; criticism of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 693
- Messina, 337
- Metamorphosis of Animals*, 391; of *Plants*, 391, 507
- Meteorology, study of, 625
- Metternich, Prince, at Weimar, 581; policy, 607, 614; at Carlsbad, 607, 617
- Meyer, Johann Heinrich, 329, 341; resides with Goethe, 422, 457; Director of the Weimar Drawing-school, 422 n., 457; illness, 457; at Stäfa, 458; Cassel, 464; accident, 603
- Meyer, Dr. R. H., opinion of *Iphigenie*, 363 n.; Goethe, 786 n.
- Michael Angelo, works of, 330, 332
- Milan cathedral, 345
- Milton, John, *Comus*, 365; *Paradise Lost*, 492, 630, 736, 747; *Samson Agonistes*, 630; controversial pamphlets, 797
- Mitschuldigen*, *Die*, 36-39, 310
- Mitternacht*, *Um*, 611
- Möller, Johann Philipp, 321
- Mond*, *An den*, 293
- Mont Blanc, 258
- Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 595 n.
- Moore, Thomas, criticism of, 631; *Life of Byron*, 634 n.
- Moritz, Karl Philipp, 329; accident, 329
- Morris, Max, *Der junge Goethe*, 20 n., 128 n., 155 n., 180 n., 209 n., 211 n.
- Moselle, the, 420
- Mülheim, 170
- Müller, Chancellor von, 5 n., 32, 43 n., 345, 566 n., 623, 632, 637, 649
- Müller, Joseph, 533
- Münch, Anna Sibylla, 148
- Munich, 324
- Münster, 421
- Musenalmanach*, 484
- Mystifizierten*, *Die*, 406 n., 428
- NACHT, *Die schöne*, 36
- Nachtgesang*, 507
- Naples, 335, 338
- Napoleon, Emperor, opinion of *Werther*, 147, 546; tribute to Duchess Luise of Weimar, 225 n.; at Weimar, 535, 547; treatment of the Duke of Weimar, 536; at Erfurt Congress, 545; interviews with Goethe, 546, 547; invasion of Russia, 576; marriage, 576; retreat, 577; coalition against, 579; defeat at the battle of Leipzig, 580; abdication, 582; saying of, 602
- Nassau, 168
- Natur*, *Die*, 275
- Natürliche Tochter*, *Die*, 481, 494-500; criticisms on, 498; style, 499
- Neue Liebe, neues Leben*, 184
- Neue Lieder*, 35; style, 36
- Neumann, Christiane, death, 459
- Newman, Cardinal, patron saint, 339 n.
- Newton, Sir Isaac, theory of light, 409, 572, 728
- Ney, Marshal, at Weimar, 535
- Nibelungenlied*, 532, 539
- Nicolai, the publisher, 583
- Niebuhr, B. G., criticism of *Italienische Reise*, 324
- Niederrossla, 534
- Novalis, opinion of Goethe, 522
- Nur wer die Sehnsucht*, 291
- Nuremberg, 461
- Nussbraune Mädchen*, *Das*, 695, 701
- OBERONS und Titanias goldne Hochzeit, 733, 735
- Oberrossla, 462, 468
- Oeser, Friedrich, influence on Goethe,

- 33; letters from him, 49, 52;  
 director of the Drawing Academy  
 of Leipzig, 322  
 Offenbach, 196, 206, 597  
*Optik, Beiträge zur*, 410  
 Ovid, lines from, 345  
 Oxenford, John, 639 *n.*, 716 *n.*
- PADUA, 326, 403  
 Page, W. Gregory A., translation  
 of *Wilhelm Meister*, 314 *n.*  
*Paläophron und Neoterpe*, 502  
 Palermo, 336  
*Pandora*, 527, 550, 551-558  
 Paracelsus, 47  
*Paria*, 626-628  
 Paris, Revolution, 654  
 Passavant, tour with Goethe, 202-204  
 Paul, Jean, 474, 638; interview with  
 Goethe, 475; *Hesperus*, 732 *n.*  
 Paulus, Heinrich, Professor of Ori-  
 ental languages at Jena University,  
 leaves, 471  
 Pempelfort, 171, 172, 420  
 Perugia, 327  
 Peters, F. H., translation of *Ethics*,  
 793 *n.*  
*Pfaffenspiel*, 588  
 Pfenninger, Heinrich, 164 *n.*  
*Pilgernde Thörin, Die*, 695, 699  
 Plants, metamorphosis of, 273, 274  
*n.*, 326, 334  
 Plessing, morbid condition, 246;  
 Professor of Ancient Philosophy,  
 420  
*Poetische Gedanken über die Höllen-  
 fahrt Jesu Christi*, 20  
 Pogwisch, Ottlie von, marriage, 605.  
*See Goethe*  
 Poischwitz, armistice of, 578  
 Pollock, Sir Frederick, *Spinoza*,  
 132 *n.*  
 Pompeii, 336, 649  
 Pope, the, celebrates high mass, 332  
*Prometheus*, 128-133  
*Prometheus, Die Befreiung des*, 502  
*Propyläen*, 461 *n.*, 469, 733; failure,  
 412  
 Prussia, alliance with Germany, 271;  
 negotiations with Austria, 406;  
 policy of neutrality, 531; mobi-  
 lisation, 534; peace with France,  
 538 *n.*, 552  
 Prussians, character, 583  
 Pyrmont, 462-464
- RACINE, Jean, *Andromaque*, 545  
 Raphael, works of, 332, 339  
 Ratisbon, 324  
 Reiffenstein, Hofrat, 331 *n.*  
*Reincke Fuchs*, 435  
 Reinhard, Karl Friedrich, Graf von,  
 at Carlsbad, 539  
 Reinhold, Professor, 411, 469  
*Reise der Söhne Mcgaprazons*, 434  
 Reuss, Prince, 414 *n.*  
*Revue Hebdomadaire, La*, 418 *n.*  
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, *Discourses*,  
 514 *n.*  
 Rhine, the, 169, 595; Confederation  
 of the, 533, 537, 548  
 Richardson, Samuel, *Clarissa Har-  
 love*, 138 *n.*  
 Riemer, secretary to Goethe, 24, 533,  
 536; leaves, 581 *n.*  
 Riggi, Maddalena, relations with  
 Goethe, 343  
 Robinson, Henry Crabb, impres-  
 sions of Goethe, 443, 474, 640; of  
 Schiller, 443; of Weimar theatre,  
 466  
 Roche, Frau von la, 114; appear-  
 ance, 114; friendship with Goethe,  
 115  
 Roche, Herr von la, 114  
 Roche, Maximiliane von la, relations  
 with Goethe, 115, 137; marriage,  
 137, 541, 564  
 Roche, Sophie von la, 119, 171;  
 letter from Goethe, 180 *n.*  
 Rochester, Earl of, lines of, 138 *n.*  
 Rogers, Alexander, translation of  
*Reineke Fuchs*, 436 *n.*  
*Roman Elegies*, 392-396, 482, 608,  
 727  
 Romantic School, views, 517-524;  
 members, 520-522; creed of neo-  
 Catholicism, 569  
 Rome, 328-335, 339-345, 649; St.  
 Peter's, 331; Festival of all Saints,  
 332; of Corpus Christi, 339; car-  
 nival, 342  
*Rome, Second Sojourn in*, 629, 636,  
 725  
 Rousseau, J. J., 82; *Nouvelle Hé-  
 loïse*, 138 *n.*  
*Rovers, The, or The Double Ar-  
 rangement*, 192 *n.*  
 Rumohr, W. von, letter from Goethe,  
 40 *n.*  
 Russia, invaded by the French, 576



- SAALE, the, 646  
 Sachs, Hans, 124, 305  
 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 664  
 St. Gothard, 204, 258, 458  
 St. Hilaire, Geoffrey, controversy with Cuvier, 654, 781  
 St. Philip Neri, sketch of his life, 339  
 Sainte-Beuve, C. A., opinion of *Werther*, 145 n.; *Goethe et Bettina*, 542 n.; on the relations between Goethe and his mother, 544  
 Ste. Menchould, 418  
 Salzmann, Dr., character, 58; friendship with Goethe, 58; letters from him, 87; creed, 300  
*Sanct Joseph der Zweite*, 695, 698  
 Sand, George, opinion of Goethe, 786  
 Sand, Karl, assassinates Kotzebue, 616  
*Sänger, Der*, 293, 294  
*Satyros oder der vergötterte Waldteufel*, 126  
 Saunders, Bailey, *Maxims and Reflections of Goethe*, 658 n.  
 Saussure, H. B. de, meeting with Goethe, 258; *Voyage dans les Alpes*, 261  
 Savary, General, at Erfurt, 546  
 Saxe-Weimar, Duchy of, 536  
*Schäfers Klagelied*, 506  
 Schaffhausen, 202, 458  
 Schelling, F. W. J., philosophy, 471, 473, 521; opinion of *Elective Affinities*, 569  
 Scherer, Edmond, 4; criticism on *Götz von Berlichingen*, 94; opinion of Goethe, 798  
 Scherer, W., *History of German Literature*, 502 n.  
*Scherz, List und Rache*, 310  
 Schiller, Frau, on Goethe's state of mind, 575  
 Schiller, Johann C. F., 4, 19, 67 n.; influence on his writings, 95; correspondence with Goethe, 114 n., 442, 449-453; description of Frau von Stein, 232; adapts *Egmont* for the stage, 354 n.; criticism on it, 355; on *Iphigenie*, 364; on Goethe's weakness of will, 378 n.; journal *Die Horen*, 395, 482; opinion of the *Roman Elegies*, 395; lines, 396; impressions of Goethe, 397-399; on the character of his philosophy, 412; the *Robbers*, 439; tact, 439, 442; relations with Goethe, 439-443; Professor of History at Jena University, 440; *Don Carlos*, 440; marriage, 440; *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 440 n.; interview with Goethe, 441; characteristics, 442-444; appearance, 443; friendship with Goethe, 443-453, 477, 787; career, 444; interest in history, 446; an idealist, 447-449; opinion of *Wilhelm Meister*, 451; *Wallenstein*, 451, 486; *Wilhelm Tell*, 460, 466; plays, 466; objections to C. Vulpus, 476; illness, 477, 478; death, 478; lines on, 480; epigrams, 484; opinion of *Hermann und Dorothea*, 489; of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498; repugnance to the Romantics, 520; dislike to C. Schlegel, 522 n.; *Demetrius*, 527; *Die Glöcke*, 529; poem on his skull, 655; opinion of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 688, 691 n.; of *Faust*, 728  
 Schimmelmänn, Charlotte Gräfin, 445  
 Schlapp, Dr. Otto, vii.  
 Schlegel, A. W., Professor of Literature at Jena University, 473; character, 473; contributor to *Die Horen*, 482; opinion of *Hermann und Dorothea*, 489; tutor to Madame de Staël's sons, 521; translation of Shakespeare's plays, 523  
 Schlegel, Caroline, characteristics, 522  
 Schlegel, Frederick, play, 408; *Alarcos*, 521; characteristics, 521; founder of the *Athenæum*, 521; *Lucinde*, 521; book on India, 590; opinion of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 691  
 Schlosser, Cornelia, last meeting with her brother, 200; death, 201, 243; grave, 257; devotion to her brother, 787  
 Schlosser, F. C., 85; impressions of Goethe, 104  
 Schlosser, Fritz, 594  
 Schlosser, J. Georg, 85; marriage, 119; second marriage, 257, 280  
 Schlosser, Joanna, 257  
 Schmidt, Erich, 212  
 Schönmänn, Frau, 181

- Schönemann, Lili, 181; relations with Goethe, 182-197, 206, 288, 663; characteristics, 183; appearance, 183; at Offenbach, 196; betrothal, 197; marriage, 211 *n.*; meeting with Goethe, 257; son, 534 *n.*
- Schönkopf, Käthchen, relations with Goethe, 27-32, 50; betrothal, 50
- Schopenhauer, A., 409 *n.*; at Weimar, 536
- Schopenhauer, Madame, at Weimar, 536
- Schrempf, C., *Goethes Lebensanschauung*, 786 *n.*
- Schröter, Corona, 310 *n.*, 313, 359
- Schulthess, Barbara, 460 *n.*
- Schütz, C. G., Professor of History at Jena University, 471; at Halle University, 471
- Schwager Kronos*, Ar, 176
- Sciacca, 337
- Scott, Sir Walter, translation of *Götz von Berlichingen*, 96; *Kenilworth*, 353 *n.*; *Waverley Novels*, 632; *Life of Napoleon*, 632 *n.*
- Sebus, Johanna, 552
- Seeley, Sir John, 630; opinion of Goethe, 785, 789
- Segesta, 337
- Seidel, Philipp, 285, 321
- Serassi, *Life of Tasso*, 367
- Sesenheim, 70, 256
- Seven Years' War, 13
- Shakespeare, William, panegyric on, 88; *Richard III.*, 452; translation of his plays, 523; estimate of, 630
- Shelley, P. B., elopement, 385 *n.*; *Prometheus Unbound*, 502
- Sidgwick, Henry, criticism of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 665; opinion of Goethe, 785
- Siedler, Luise, 577
- Silesia, 406
- Singspiele*, 307
- Smith, Minna Steele, *Poetry and Truth from my Own Life*, 40 *n.*
- Soret, Friedrich, 637; reports of Goethe's conversation, 620 *n.*; anecdote of Goethe, 653
- Soult, Marshal, at Erfurt, 347
- Southey, Robert, characteristics, 637 *n.*
- Spain, fighting in, 548
- Spinoza, Benedict, influence on Goethe, 154-156, 276, 280; *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 155, 156; tribute to, 166; character, 173; the "atheist," 174; *Ethic*, 576
- Spröde, Die*, 507
- Stael, Madame de, at Weimar, 475; volubility, 475; meeting with Goethe, 475; criticism of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 500; of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 664
- Stäfa, 457, 458, 459
- Starke, Dr., 461
- Steffens, H., 549 *n.*
- Stein, Baron von, 231; Minister of State, 594; meeting with Goethe, 595
- Stein, Carl, on the character of his mother, 387
- Stein, Charlotte, Frau von, 6 *n.*, 33 *n.*, 110 *n.*; letters from Goethe, 182 *n.*, 383-385; relations with him, 230-235, 242, 281-285, 289, 380-387, 797; appearance and characteristics, 231, 387; portrait, 232; estimate of Goethe, 234; letter to Major von Knebel, 274; fits of depression, 283, 289; breach with Goethe, 285, 335, 667; opinion of *Tasso*, 368 *n.*; at Ems, 383; on the illness of Goethe, 462; death, 644; lines on, 644; funeral, 645; criticism on *Wilhelm Meister*, 675, 691
- Stein, Fritz, devotion to Goethe, 380; letter from his brother, 387
- Stella or A Play for Lovers*, 189-193, 288
- Sterling, John, opinion of Goethe, 784; *Onyx Ring*, 784
- Sterne, Laurence, 82; *Sentimental Journey*, 403; estimate of, 631
- Stevenson, R. L., opinion of *Werther*, 147 *n.*
- Stieler, J., portrait of Goethe, 646
- Stilling, Jung, friendship with Goethe, 59-61, 787; career, 59; tribute to, 61; at Elberfeld, 170; epigram on, 484
- Stolberg, Count von, at Frankfort, 198; tour with Goethe, 199; epigram on, 484
- Stolberg, Fritz von, burns *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 691
- Stolberg, Güstchen, Countess von, correspondence with Goethe, 186, 198, 207, 233 *n.*, 628. *See* Bernstoff

Strassburg, 53, 54, 200, 219, 257, 663,  
720; cathedral, 68  
Stuttgart, 458  
Suez Canal, 653  
Sulzer, J. G., impressions of Goethe,  
208  
Swanwick, Miss, 212 n.  
Swedenborg, Emanuel, 297 n.;  
writings, 531  
Swift, Jonathan, attitude to mar-  
riage, 389 n.  
Switzerland, 202, 254, 256, 258, 458-  
461  
Syracuse, 337  
Szymanowska, Madame, 623  
  
TAINÉ, Henri, opinion of Goethe,  
786  
Talleyrand, at Erfurt, 546  
Talma, 545  
Taormina, 337  
*Taschenbuch*, 489  
Tasso, Torquato, *Jerusalem De-  
livered*, 366, 369  
Tasso, 314, 336, 366-375, 391, 724,  
727; criticisms on, 375  
Taylor, Bayard, translation of *Faust*,  
Part II., 765  
Tennstadt, sulphur springs, 603  
Tennyson, Lord, *The Palace of Art*,  
217 n.  
Teplitz, 576, 579  
Textor, Chief Magistrate of Frank-  
fort, 5, 13; death, 419  
Thackeray, W. M., interview with  
Goethe, 640  
Thorane, Count, 15  
Thorwaldsen, B., 649 n.  
Thuringian Forest, 240, 244, 580,  
780  
Ticknor, George, at Weimar, 603;  
impressions of Goethe, 603  
Tieck, Ludwig, 522; translation of  
*Don Quixote*, 523  
Tiefurt, 310 n.  
*Tiefurt, Journal von*, 275 n.  
Tischbein, Johann, 328, 341; por-  
trait of Goethe, 329 n.; at Naples,  
335  
*Todtentanz, Der*, 587  
*Trauerloge*, 611  
Trent, 325  
Trèves, 419  
*Triumph der Empfindsamkeit, Der*,  
311  
*Trost in Thränen*, 506

Tübingen, 458  
Türkheim, Major von, 534 n.  
Turgenieff, Ivan, 133 n.  
  
*UEBER allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*, 240,  
296, 780  
*Ultimatum*, 625  
Unger, the publisher, 668  
United States, 653  
*Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausge-  
wanderten*, 434  
*Urfaust*, 200, 213-216, 319, 320, 719,  
721-723, 727, 738  
*Urworte, Orphisch*, 611  
  
VALMY, 417; battle of, 418  
*Veilchen auf der Wiese stand, Ein*,  
189 n.  
*Venetian Epigrams*, 404, 727  
Venice, 326, 402  
Verdun, siege of, 417  
*Vermüchtniss*, 656  
Verona, 325, 404  
Vesuvius, 336, 338; eruption, 339  
Vicenza, 325, 403  
Vienna, Congress of, 600  
*Vier Jahreszeiten*, 507  
Vogel, Dr., 637, 782; *Goethe's Selbst-  
zeugnisse*, 777  
*Vögel, Die*, 312, 583  
Voigt, C. G., letter from Fichte,  
470; death, 616  
Volkmann, Johann Jakob, *Histo-  
risch-kritische Nachrichten von  
Italien*, 325 n.  
*Vollmonde, Dem aufgehenden*, 647  
Voltaire, *Mahomet*, 133, 467 n., 546,  
733; *Tancred*, 467 n., 733; criti-  
cism on, 511; *La mort de César*,  
547  
*Von dem Berge, zu den Hügeln*, 226  
Voss, Heinrich, 478 n.; *Luise*, 487  
Vulpus, Christiane, relations with  
Goethe, 226, 382-391, 476; appear-  
ance, 382, 391, 476; birth of a son,  
387; marriage, 390, 535; at Frank-  
fort, 457; love of dancing, 476;  
letters from Goethe, 477; illness  
and death, 602  
  
WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN, *Die*,  
525, 527, 550, 551, 558-569; criti-  
cisms on, 569, 687, 792 n.  
*Walpurgisnacht, Die*, 462, 504  
*Wanderer, Der*, 102-104  
*Wanderers Sturmlied*, 101



- Wanderjahre*, 629  
 Ward, Mrs. Humphry, translation of Amiel, 741 n.  
 Wartburg, 244; festival at, 606  
*Warum gabst du uns die tiefen Blicke*, 290  
*Was wir bringen*, 502, 503  
 Wedel, Baron von, 255  
 Weimar, 212, 220, 464, 781; population, 221; etiquette of the Court, 221; War Commission, 251; new palace, 468; Friday Evening Society, 469; invaded by the French, 534; grant of a new constitution, 601; theatre, 304, 359, 379, 407, 465; performances, 306; enlarged, 466; burnt down, 642  
*Weimar Theatre, Prelude for the Opening of the, on the Happy Return of the Ducal Family*, 552  
*Weimar, Die Lustigen von*, 587  
 Weimar, Dowager Duchess Amalia of, character, 221, 223; marriage, 222; administration, 223; wish to visit Rome, 344; at Rome, 401; at Venice, 402; death, 539  
 Weimar, Carl August, Duke of, meeting with Goethe, 178; betrothal, 200; marriage, 209; at Frankfort, 209; invites Goethe to Weimar, 209, 219; friendship with him, 220, 224, 241, 269, 455; tutor, 223; character, 224, 260; gift to Goethe, 229, 236; at Wartburg, 244; tour with Goethe, 255-259; curtailment of expenditure, 268; alliance with Prussia, 271; estrangement with Goethe, 271; letter from him, 285; relations with his wife, 308; criticism on *Egmont*, 355; *Tasso*, 372; godfather to Goethe's son, 387, 390; tribute to, 405; military expeditions, 405; at Pymont, 463; opinion of *Die natürliche Tochter*, 498; policy to Prussia, 531; joins the troops at Niederrossla, 534; allowed to retain his Duchy, 536, 552; forced to join the Confederation of the Rhine, 537, 545, 552; created Grand Duke, 600; treatment of Goethe, 604; grant of a free constitution, 617; jubilee of his accession, 642; death, 645  
 Weimar, Prince Constantin, meeting with Goethe, 178  
 Weimar, Ernst Augustine Constantine, Duke of, 222  
 Weimar, Duchess Luise, 222; characteristics, 225, 648; treatment of C. Vulpus, 390; heroic conduct, 536; death, 648  
*Weisen, Die*, 588  
*Weltseele, Die*, 473, 507  
*Wer ist der Verräter*, 695, 700  
*Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergiebt*, 291, 292  
 Werner, Zacharias, *Martin Luther*, 540; at Weimar, 549, 554; sonnet on Goethe, 549; plays, 568  
 Wernigerode, 246  
*Werther*, 80, 83, 105, 116, 136-142, 219, 222, 316-318, 425, 546; publication, 139, 144; criticisms on, 144; influence, 146; imitations, 146  
 Werthes, F. A., impressions of Goethe, 177  
 Westbrook, Harriet, 385 n.  
*West-östlicher Divan*, 525, 577 n., 590, 593, 596, 607-611, 614  
*Wette, Die gefährliche*, 709  
 Wetzlar, 105  
*Wiedersehn, Das*, 504  
*Wiederfinden*, 599  
 Wieland, C. M., criticism on his writings, 52; *Alceste*, 127, 227; tutor to Prince Carl August of Weimar, 223; impressions of Goethe, 228, 264; letter from him, 234; relations with him, 280, 454, 787; journal, the *Mercur*, 391; member of the *Freitagsgesellschaft*, 414 n.; cross of the Legion of Honour conferred, 547 n.; criticism of *Elective Affinities*, 569; death, 578; criticism of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 691  
 Wiesbaden, 591, 594, 603  
*Wilhelm Meister*, 15, 48, 520; translation of, 635; *Lehrjahre*, 314, 318-320, 481, 666-694; criticisms on, 691-694; *Theatralische Sendung*, 314-320, 667, 679, 687, 729; *Wanderjahre*, 525, 530, 636, 695-718  
*Willkommen und Abschied*, 78  
 Willemer, Johann Jacob, 593; marriage, 594  
 Willemer, Marianne von, poetic gift, 594, 597; relations with Goethe,

- 597; death, 598; Stanzas, 598; poem to, 647
- Winckelmann, Johann Joachim, 333; *History of Ancient Art*, 333, 515
- Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*, essay, 515-517, 523, 660
- Winter und Timur, Der*, 577 n.
- Wirkung in die Ferne*, 552
- Wolf, F. A., 473; *Prolegomena to Homer*, 474, 487, 630; at Weimar, 527; relations with Goethe, 528; at Tennstädt, 603
- Wordsworth, William, criticism on the poetry of Goethe, 39; poems of humble life, 493; criticism of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 693; austerity, 796
- XENIEN, 426 n., 483-486
- YOUNG, Edward, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 65, 69
- ZAHME Xenien, 614
- Zelter, Herr, 142, 342, 450, 478; letters from Goethe, 467, 530, 618, 650, 661, 780; friendship with him, 526, 787; at Weimar, 529, 530, 623, 651; Director of the Berlin Singing Academy, 529; characteristics, 530; at Wiesbaden, 592
- Ziegesar, Sylvie, 543
- Zimmermann, J. G., 225 n., 227 n., 232; *Solitude*, 209; impressions of Goethe, 209; letters from Frau von Stein, 233-235
- Zudringlichen, Den*, 588
- Zuleika, Buch*, 598, 608
- Zurich, 202, 458, 460
- Zwei wichtige bisher unerörterte biblische Fragen*, 123

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